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Corporal Cat

PLAYS BY MR. FLAVIN

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CHILDREN OF THE MOON	DANCING DAYS
LADY OF THE ROSE	AMACO
SERVICE FOR TWO	ACHILLES HAD A HEEL
THE CRIMINAL CODE	TAPESTRY IN GRAY
BROKEN DISHES	AROUND THE CORNER
CROSS ROADS	BLUE JEANS
SPINDRIFT	

.

ONE ACT PLAYS

BRAINS
CASUALTIES
THE BLIND MAN
AN EMERGENCY CASE
A QUESTION OF PRINCIPLE
CALEB STONE'S DEATH WATCH

.

NOVELS

MR. LITTLEJOHN
CORPORAL CAT

.

Corporal Cat

*The Story of a German
Parachute Soldier*

by

MARTIN FLAVIN



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CORPORAL CAT

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FIRST EDITION

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To
CONNIE

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Corporal Cat

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1

STEPHAN RAEDER

sat alone in the tail end of the plane which was too narrow at this point to accommodate another passenger,—a position of importance in a way, since he would be last to jump. The section leader, Sergeant Werner, would go first, and he, Corporal Raeder, would go last. It was his business to see that all the men had cleared in proper manner before he left the ship,—a matter of some responsibility. But it did not explain the way he felt.

In front of him, so close that by stretching out his legs he could touch them with his feet, were Karl and Otto, and in front of them where the fuselage was wider were Walter, Mark, and Erich.

There were twenty altogether, all the members of his section. He could not see them in the dark but he knew where each one sat. And if any voice were raised above the roaring of the motors he would know which one had spoken. He knew them all that well. But of course he knew Karl best. Well naturally. They had met in their year of Voluntary Labor almost two years ago when they were really youngsters. He felt with his foot for the chute pack of his friend.

“Yes, Stephan?”

“Nothing, Karl.” He laughed. “I was just stretching out my legs.” He pressed his toe tighter in the fabric. There was a sense of reassurance in the contact.

It was dark and it was cold, and the air was getting bumpy. Far off in the nose were the two pilots, Luftwaffe men and strangers, shadowy silhouettes against the dimly lighted instruments. They had no hazard in the outcome of this matter, and were probably disdainful of their job of ferrying troops,—snooty fellows as a rule. They would dump out their cargo with no more concern

than a teamster would dump bricks. And then they would go back to get another load. . . .

He changed the subject of his thought. The plane was an old Lufthansa transport, stripped bare of seats, of everything, like the empty skin of a banana. Its windows were blacked out, and forward, in the middle, there would likely be a trapdoor in the floor through which you would bail out. But he had not thought to notice when he entered. Sometimes there was a trap, and sometimes there was not. He liked it better when there wasn't, when you went out through a door just as you would if the plane were on the ground—like a traveler on a trip. There was something about stepping off an edge into a hole,—like a well, or like—a gallows. Yes, that was it exactly. . . .

He glanced at his wrist watch, which glowed green in the dark. Almost one o'clock. Twenty minutes had already ticked away. In an hour more, or perhaps a little less. . . .

Suddenly he felt a sense of panic, and fumbling in the dark, he hastily checked the buckles of his harness. Until tonight he had always had two chutes. If one failed to break out or fouled, there

was a second waiting to be used. But now he had the one upon his back, and that was all. He himself had packed it, every crease and fold. But suppose he had not packed it right? Suppose. . . .

What nonsense! He found the handle of the rip cord and felt around it carefully. Sometimes there was a static line to pull the rip cord for you,—a comforting device when the altitude was low, and a second of delay might be too long. But tonight they would be high, and each man would rip his own. A simple matter, really. It was curious the way he felt about it. . . .

For a year he had been jumping out of planes,—day after day, at two hundred meters and two thousand,—in daylight and at night,—in fog, in wind, in rain; in summer, winter, snow, and ice. And nothing had gone wrong; not once had he used that second chute. Twice he had come down in water, but they had fished him out before he was wet through. Twice he had landed in a tree, and once in darkness on a farmhouse roof. And it had been the farmer who was frightened. He had not hurt himself, not once, not in the least, not even

at the start, before he mastered the technique of making contact with the ground.

And it was not just luck. He was skillful at the thing; he had the knack of landing like a cat. His captain had said that,—Captain von Kurtz. That was why he had been made a corporal. The captain had stopped in front of him as he stood at attention in the middle of his section, not expecting anything at all. He had stood there looking at him with that glass stuck in his eye, and the faint contemptuous smile on his thin, aristocratic face. There was a man for you, as hard as steel, as cold as ice. Sweat had poured out all over Stephan's body. He had never been so frightened.

"Raeder," the captain said, "somewhere among your ancestors there must have been a cat." And he had slapped his shiny boot with the little stick he carried and walked on down the line. And Stephan had been made a corporal. The captain never spoke to him again or seemed to be aware he was alive. But with a man like that you couldn't tell; you simply had no clue to what he thought.

And always after that his comrades called him Cat,—Corporal Cat. Only Karl did not. And he

had rather liked it,—a mark of importance and distinction. He had written all about it to his mother and to Martha, in the Westphalian town which was his home. And sometimes he signed his letters “Your loving son—Cat” or just “Your loving—Cat.” And once for a joke Martha had written him and addressed her letter simply “Corporal Cat” without any mention of his name. And it had been delivered.

Yes, it was a good name, something he had earned—a reward for doing well. Nobody in the section was so clever with a chute, could trim it so nicely, could so well direct its course, or collapse it so quickly once it touched the ground. And no one could land so lightly on his feet. Corporal Cat. He had long since ceased to be afraid. The whole thing had been something of a game. Why did it seem so different now. . . .

He finished with the harness and fingered the grenade bag which was strapped across his shoulders on his breast,—each ball of death packed in its wadded pocket,—the only weapons that he had except the Luger buckled in the holster of his belt. His equipment was in order. Nothing was amiss.

His tin hat, his wire cutters and his knife, his compass and his map—he felt each one of them, made sure each was there. But he could not stop the thought that he had started:—Why was it different now?

For a year he had been waiting for this day—or for this night—looking forward to it. This was what the whole thing was about. You couldn't play football by yourself. The object of the game was to vanquish an opponent. And of course he had known that all the time. It was difficult to put it into words—the way he felt about it. As if he had suddenly become of no importance to anyone except himself. These people who had taught him all the tricks of parachuting to the ground: how to ease the dislocating jerk when the chute billowed out and caught the air, how to guide its course and check the sickening swinging motion, how to extricate himself when his feet had touched the ground before the chute could get control and drag him, and all the things to do from that point on,—well, they had finished with him now. They had no further interest in him. They had nursed him like a child and then abandoned him. He had

been fed and clothed and housed—and even born, for this; fatted and groomed and trained. . . .

He remembered something his grandfather had told him years ago when, as he often did, he had stopped in at the cobbler's shop on his way home from school. A soldier had come in to have his shoes mended. And when he had gone Stephan had said:

“When I grow up I will be a soldier.”

“Will you, Stephan?” The old man pushed his glasses up above his nose and held out a piece of leather which he had been cutting. “This is a soldier's skin,” he said.

“Oh no,” said Stephan, “that is calf skin.”

“So?” Old Anton smiled. “A calf and a soldier are very much alike. If a calf is sickly they feed him with a bottle until he is big and strong, and if he has a belly ache they call the veterinary. They give him all that he can eat and they keep him warm at night. And perhaps they tie a ribbon on his neck and take him to the Fair, and march him up and down. And all the people look at him.”

“That is good,” said Stephan.

“No, that is not good, Stephan.” The old man

shook his head. "Because, you see, they do not really care about the calf; they did not do these things for him but for themselves. And one day when the calf is big and strong, in the flood tide of his youth, before he has had a chance to more than nibble at the flowers in the meadows, when he has barely tasted life—well then, one day they pick up a mallet and hit him on the head, and he is veal and shoe leather—just like this piece that I am cutting now."

Yes, he remembered that as if it had been yesterday. The old man had been something of a crank—religious and a socialist. He had almost got the family into trouble with his talk before he died. Stephan's father had been furious about it and his mother had been tearful and upset. It was not good for business in the little dry goods shop above which the family lived, and it was dangerous too.

"Such talk!" Herman Raeder shouted, standing behind the counter in the shop. He was beside himself with fury, as he often was,—a bitter and choleric man who had worked very hard for a little education and had hoped to be a dentist, and then had lost an arm,—his right one too, in the last week

of the War before Verdun. "Such talk! You must find some way to stop that old man's tongue."

"Yes, yes, Herman, I will—" It was his mother who replied, and she was crying softly as she often did. "I will speak to him about it."

Yes, he remembered that. It was not so long ago. But the family altercation had not impressed him deeply; he had been too much absorbed in troubles of his own. He had come home from his year of Voluntary Labor and had brought Karl with him for a visit. They were both to have a brief vacation before they joined the army. He had looked forward to it eagerly for months—had lived in expectation of the day. But it had not turned out as he had hoped. There had been misunderstandings, and dreadful things had happened between Martha and himself,—all three of them, in fact. Not things to think of now. . . .

A calf and a soldier are very much alike. He had come back to that. He did not know his father very well but he had known and loved his grandfather. He had loved to sit there in the tiny shop on rainy afternoons or in the winter when it was too cold to play outdoors. He could smell the

leather now, and see the old man's face with the spectacles pushed up above his nose and hear his gentle voice—telling stories of the past and expressing his ideas about everything on earth. He had no doubt talked too much and said many foolish things like the one about the calf. . . .

But he had been kind and gentle, even if a little cracked. The row two years ago had not been really serious. The old man had been mending shoes for Jews, old friends and customers perhaps. But the thing had got around, and one day a storm trooper had come into the shop to remonstrate about it. Anton Krohl, as might have been expected, had been a little difficult.

"Shoes are not Jews," he said.

The storm trooper was friendly and disposed to let things pass—no doubt he knew the old man's reputation. "Have that as you please, Herr Krohl," he said. "But do not mend any shoes for Jews. That is all I care about the matter." And he turned to go out.

"Very well," grumbled Anton, "but it will pass."

"What did you say?" The storm trooper came back.

"I said that it would pass."

"What will pass?"

"You and all your kind, and your ideas."

"What do you mean by that, Herr Krohl?"

"Everything passes."

"Do you include the Führer in that statement?"

"Everything passes," insisted Anton stubbornly.

The storm trooper did not know that this was one of Anton's favorite sayings which he applied without discrimination, and so reported him to the authorities. And there had been an investigation and quite a scandal in the neighborhood, whose repercussions wrecked a window of the dry goods shop. It was this that he remembered: the broken glass upon the floor and his father standing there behind the counter with his right sleeve hanging loose and his thin face white with fury.

Old Anton had preserved his dignity throughout all this unpleasantness. He would not withdraw what he had said. But he mended no more shoes for Jews, and indeed not many more for anyone. For shortly after this, he died—stubborn to the last. At the end he had leaned back on his pillow and whispered with a smile, "Everything passes."

Well, there might be something in it after all. And if everything did pass, what was the good of struggling to hang onto it?—of jumping out of planes with parachutes, of stalking other strugglers, of throwing little balls of death, and—being thrown at. . . .

He felt again for the handle of the rip cord. If he jerked it sharply the pack would come apart and the chute would be as useless as a bedspread. He could say that it had snagged on something. Yes, but on what? "Come now," he said aloud between his teeth, "what are you thinking?" There were stories of malingerers whose chutes had billowed out like skirts in similar circumstances. The Luftwaffe pilots took them home and they were shot. There was no getting out of things like this. If there were, everybody would get out. Nobody really wanted to be killed. . . .

His foot dug sharply in the chute pack of his friend.

"Yes, Stephan?"

"Nothing, Karl." He shivered. "It is cold."

"Yes, cold."

The plane lurched violently. He caught his

breath with every muscle taut. Was it a shell?—from an anti-aircraft gun?—Could they be under fire?—How could he tell, sealed up here like a sardine in a tin? He looked at his watch: five minutes after one. He could not believe his eyes. It must have stopped, but it was fully wound. He held it to his ear but could not hear it ticking. And then he watched the minute hand until he saw it move. Five minutes, that was all, since he had looked before—and it seemed at least an hour. He leaned against the curving wall with a great sense of relief. It had not been a shell. They had not crossed the frontier yet. The enemy was still far off. . . .

Another lurch. Another—and another. The air was getting rough. If this kept up somebody would be ill. Richard, or Paul perhaps. It was good those two were up in front. But there were several more with squeamish stomachs. Anyway if it got started you couldn't tell where it would end. Being sick at your stomach was contagious. You couldn't hear them gagging; the motors drowned that out. The first you knew of it was what you smelled. . . .

Saliva gathered in his mouth. A light was moving up ahead—a flashlight close against the floor,

creeping toward the nose. It was probably the section leader, Werner, crawling up there to interrogate the pilots. Well, they wouldn't tell him much. Those Luftwaffe men were very snooty fellows. They looked at you as if they did not see you—as if you were not there—like his captain with that glass stuck in his eye. Where was he now, the captain? Ahead of them no doubt, with some other section, already on the ground. But no matter where he was he would look just the same and his boots would still be shiny. How long did it take to get to be like that? Or could you ever be unless you had been always? He was nineteen; in a month he would be twenty. Well, you didn't change much after that. He sniffed the air against his will, and then he could not stop a memory which came crowding back. . . .

He had been new then in the army and all of the recruits had been paraded for inspection by the Führer who was passing by their camp. They had stood in close ranks for a long time, several thousand of them. The Führer was delayed, and no one knew just when he would arrive, so they had gone on just standing there, unable to break ranks. The

occasion was a most exciting one. Very few of them had ever seen the Führer, and they wanted to see him, and to look and act like soldiers.

The day was bright, and the parade ground dry and dusty. At length, when they had waited a long time, he noticed something which at first he could not understand:—a damp spot in the dust at the feet of a boy who was in the rank in front of him two or three paces distant. How could that be, he thought. And then after a while he saw another, and another, and looking down the rank in which he stood, he saw that there were other damp spots here and there. And suddenly he understood. The officers, not knowing when the Führer would arrive, would not permit the men to leave the ranks to attend to their necessities. And so they had just stood there and wet themselves like babies—like animals, in fact—

He had been so revolted and ashamed—ashamed of his comrades, of human beings made to seem like—monkeys, dirty little animals. But of course they weren't to blame. And then abruptly the need had come to him, induced perhaps by fear of it. He had gritted his teeth against the pain which was like

a stabbing knife. At last a whisper had run through the ranks: "The Führer."—"Attention!" cried the officers. He had stood rigid in his place, eyes to the front—had raised his arm at the command and shouted with the rest, "Heil Hitler!" And all the time he was just hanging on, sweat in his hands and dripping down his face. The Führer had gone by, striding quickly with his staff. But he had not even seen him. His eyes were closed in agony. . . .

Now what had made him think of that?—Oh yes! Those fellows who were seasick when the air was rough. He sniffed again. Werner was coming back. He could see the flashlight moving on the floor among the men who crowded back to make way for the sergeant. Werner was old, twenty-five perhaps, and had seen active service. He was not a man to be disturbed by unpleasant sights or smells. He would laugh about such matters. Well, that was how a person felt about it. He, Stephan Raeder,—Corporal Cat in fact, second in command—did not like such things. There was no disgrace in that. The plane lurched sickeningly and then dropped out from under him so that for half an instant he was hanging in the air.—Corporal Cat—or

—Corporal Calf?—He caught his breath. A stupid and unnecessary thought, but he could not stop the rest of it:—veal and shoe leather. . . .

“Cat!” The flashlight hit him in the face.

“Here,” Stephan answered and drew back. But the sergeant held the light upon him and saw an undistinguished boyish face with nice blue eyes and a cowlick in his brown hair just above the forehead—a slender boy of medium height, lithesome and agile like a cat.

“How does it go back here?”

“All right.”

“Good.” Werner sat down. He had a thermos flask under his arm. “Coffee,” he said. “It’s hot and there is rum in it.”

“Thanks—” Stephan drank out of the flask. There was no coffee in the stuff but there was rum.

Otto and Karl had turned their heads. The sergeant looked them over with the flash. That was why he had come back; that was his job. They looked all right, he thought,—a little tight and white around the lips—but that was to be expected. Otto was thin and dark, a tradesman’s son from Berlin. Karl was from the Rhineland, a round-faced boy

with blond hair and blue eyes—an easy-going youth, and something of a wag, though he did not look so waggish at the moment.

“Yes, you can have a drink,” Werner grinned, including them. “There is enough to go around.” He took the thermos back from Stephan and handed it to Karl. “How do you feel?”

“Fine,” Karl said.

“Good.” The plane lurched sickeningly again. “A little rough, eh Cat?”

“Yes—rough.” Stephan leaned farther back. He did not want the flashlight on his face.

“Some of the boys are feeling squeamish.” He laughed. “They won’t want any of this coffee, and so there will be plenty for the rest.” He took the thermos back. “You want another drink, Cat?”

“No thanks—” Again Stephan sniffed the air; he simply could not help it.

“I was talking to the pilots,” Werner said. “They think it may be smoother later on, before they pitch us out.”

“A lot they care,” Otto shouted suddenly. He had not said anything till now. “Those swine don’t think of us. Well look, when I was new, the first

time we went up, the pilot did a loop. We had no belts and we were upside down. He didn't care. He did it for a joke. He thought that it was funny."

The sergeant aimed the flashlight in his eyes and held it there. "Come now," he said gruffly, not unkindly. "No nerves, young fellow."

"Well—" Otto gulped and turned his head away.

"Attention now, you three." Werner took a map out of his pocket, unfolded it and spread it on the floor.

"Ah, God," Stephan said beneath his breath. The rum was tingling in his veins and he was suddenly aquiver with a sense of irritation. Must they go over that again?—The captain had explained it with a map and with a blackboard—strolling up and down with the glass stuck in his eye, and using for a pointer the little stick with which he slapped his boots. Everybody had explained it to everybody else, like a problem in mathematics that one had in school. He would not listen to it all again, but he heard inside his head his captain's voice, dry and detached, faintly contemptuous:

"—the enemy is in retreat. Our purpose is to get

behind him and cut off his escape. Our objective is this bridgehead which we must take and hold so that he cannot cross and get away. Other bridgeheads will be similarly taken. We are not concerned with them but only with this one. Our business is to hold this bridge. If we fail we shall be annihilated." He had paused to dust the chalk off of his fingers. "I anticipate that we will hold it." And he had turned on his heel and strolled away—as hard as steel, as cold as ice. . . .

"Are you listening, Cat?"

"Yes, listening—" Stephan said.

"Good." Werner set a stubby finger on the map. "Here is where we land, open ground, no timber and no houses—"

"I see," Karl interrupted. "Only machine guns, eh?"

Stephan laughed, but the sound that he made surprised and startled him. Good old Karl. You could always count on him to say the proper thing, the thing you couldn't quite, or didn't dare, put into words.

"Attention!" Werner grumbled. "Save your jokes to tell the girls when you get home." He

tapped his finger on the map. "Here is where we land—"

"Yes, yes—" Stephan's voice was rasping. His teeth were chattering with the cold or something. "We know all that. There is where we land—if those fellows up in front know where they are."

"So?" Werner turned the flash on him. There was a pause. Nobody spoke.

"Excuse me," Stephan said at last. "I'm sorry."

"That's all right, Cat." He folded the map and put it back. "This may all seem like kindergarten stuff and anyway you've heard it, but my orders are to go over it with every man. I do what I am told, so pay attention, please."

"I'm sorry," Stephan said again.

"All right. Now listen carefully. Remember that it will be dark. Roll up your chute and tie it and leave it where it fell. The next thing is your compass. Direction is south-east. The ground is flat and open. If you meet wire, cut it. There is a paved road on the river bank. Go on until you find it and then bear right until you are in contact with another unit. Those are the orders for this section. You understand?"

"Yes," they answered soberly.

"Good. If in a half hour from the time you start to walk you do not reach the river, or, having reached it, do not find the unit on the right, stop where you are and stay there until it is light enough to see. You understand?—not more than a half hour."

"Yes."

"But—" Stephan began and stopped.

"Well?"

"I mean, when it is light, if then—"

"Yes?—What?"

"If there is nothing to be seen?"

"Oh!" Werner shrugged. "I don't know, Cat. There are no orders about that. I guess you'd have to use your judgment."

"Yes—" Stephan nodded.

"We should come down within a circle of a hundred meters, and move together, all our section, as we have done a hundred times on much more difficult terrain. But—" He picked up the thermos flask. "—if someone should be—detached. Well, now you understand what must be done." He started to crawl away and then turned back. "The

sky will be clear with broken clouds. We will be high,—about one thousand meters. There may be a little fog close to the ground.” He paused. “Any questions?”

“No.” They shook their heads.

“Good. I will go first; Cat will come last. No one must delay or we will be scattered out of contact with each other. But do not hurry either. Take your time with everything, as you have been taught. The air is rough and the landing gear of this old ship is not retractable, so don’t forget you could get snagged in it or in the tail. There is no static line to break your packs, but don’t hurry with your rip cords. You will have lots of time.”

“How much longer?” Otto asked.

“Longer?”

“I mean, until we get there?”

Stephan’s eyes flew to his watch. One-thirty. Time had begun to move again, was no longer waiting in the dark. By now they should be over the frontier, the enemy beneath them,—retreating, it was said. But how could one be sure about that? Suppose. . . .

"Oh!" Werner calculated slowly. "In half an hour perhaps."

Lurch—lurch— The plane tipped up, trembling with the stress. Stephan was thrown back against the wall. This was no ordinary roughness of the air. An anti-aircraft shell. . . .

"In a few minutes now," the sergeant's voice went on, "we shall be over the frontier." Stephan breathed again. "Well, I guess that's all. Good luck." He turned and crawled away.

"I wonder," Otto said when he had gone, "how many of us will get back?"

"Nonsense!" Stephan stormed, really angry with himself. "What kind of talk is that? The army is behind us. They will not let us down."

"I only said—"

But Stephan hurried on, shouting above the motors. "The High Command knows what it does. When has it failed?—Just tell me that." His heart was beating very fast—the altitude perhaps. But he did not think it was.

"Stephan, Stephan—" Karl leaned back across his legs. "Why are you shouting?—Otto is afraid, and so am I—and so are you."

"Yes—" Stephan said with a deep sighing breath. It was good to get that out, to have it said. And he shouted again, this time almost boisterously: "Come now, let us sing. We are not going to a funeral."

He sang, and other voices joined him. Together in a chorus they could hear themselves; the roaring motors could not drown them out. Together they had worked and played and lived for a whole year. They were something like a football team in fact. They slept together, ate together, drilled in perfect unison; and each one was essential to the rest. Without him, Stephan, there would be no grenades, for he alone carried those little balls of death in the bag upon his breast. Without Karl the machine gun would not have a tripod; and without Bernhard it would have no ammunition. Once consolidated on the ground, all manner of things would float down out of the sky, but that came later. Now, at the start, each one carried something essential to the rest; each was a cog in an intricate machine which was called a Combat Unit. But alone and by himself each one was nothing. . . .

He sang, but his thoughts went racing on. He

had always been a part of something, not ever anything all by himself. There had been first the Jungvolk, which was so long ago that his memory was not very clear about it. It had been rather fun as he looked back on it:—hiking in the country in the woods was what he remembered best, but always with a lot of other children, not ever by himself, and always with a captain—some big boy who would tell them what to do, and who was sometimes a playful easy-going fellow, and sometimes disagreeable and severe. Some of these hikes had been quite strenuous, really too much for little boys of ten and twelve, plodding along in the hot summer time with quite heavy packs strapped on their backs. Indeed a child had died, or so it had been said, as a result of one of these excursions. Little Emil. . . .

The scene came back to him:—the winding country road, white with dust and glaring in the sun, and the column of children marching two by two with knapsacks which, since they had nothing much to carry, had been weighted down with stones. The leader for the day was a big boy from the Hitler Youth, who might have been

eighteen. Perhaps he did not relish his assignment; at all events he marched the group relentlessly up hill and down through choking dust and heat.

Sometimes he stood off at the side and, as the column passed, cried sternly, "Eyes to the front. Chin up. No slouching now." And then he would run back to the front and stride ahead so fast that the little legs must trot to keep the pace. And so they marched and sang, and marched and sang, until their throats were parched, and their khaki shirts and breeches soaked with sweat.

He remembered how his heart had pounded and how he had kept saying to himself, gritting his teeth and straining for his breath, "It cannot last forever—it cannot last forever—" Little Emil was beside him near the end of the column, and he had heard him gasping—a sort of whistling sound, and had noticed that his face was very white. But a child of twelve does not know what to do in such a situation, and so he had done nothing, nor thought about it much till afterward.

At length, when he felt that in another moment he would fall, the leader called a halt beneath some trees close by a farmer's well. And they had all

run for the water with the remnant of their strength, crowding like flies around the coping—all but little Emil. But no one had noticed that he was not among them, for, directly they had drunk, they had dropped down in the grass like tired dogs, too completely spent to think of anything. And when the brief rest period was over and it was time to start again, Emil was not beside him.

“Emil!” he called. But there was no response. The leader had come back, storming angrily.

“What is the trouble here?” he questioned.

They had found the little boy lying in the ditch beside the road almost buried in the grass. He was lying on his back, his face like chalk, and smeared with sweat and dust. And in the corner of his mouth there was a spot of blood.

“Come now, get up!” the leader said. And Emil had raised up on his elbow and then sunk back again. The leader kneeled beside him, perhaps a little frightened now, but anyway not angry.

“See here,” he said. “Are you a mother’s boy?—or a member of the Jungvolk?”

Emil had tried again to raise himself and the tears had come into his eyes and streaked the dust

upon his cheeks. "I can't—" he said, and shook his head. "I can't." And then he made a sobbing sound and a kind of quiver seemed to shake his body.

The leader had got water from the well and washed his face and poured some in his mouth, but—he was dead.

They had all gone to the funeral, marching two by two and standing at attention as the casket was lowered to the grave. He remembered a big wreath with 'From the Jungvolk' spelled out in flowers in the center, to which he had contributed ten pfennig. Afterward a letter came to little Emil's father—a letter from the Führer, signed with his own hand. . . .

Well, such things happened. It was really no one's fault. The child had a weak heart, the doctor said. Stephan's mother had been very much upset. She had wept and raised her voice in opposition to his father, which she seldom did.

"Shameful!" she cried. "What good is it to anyone, tramping up and down the country carrying stones upon their backs?" She did not want her son in the Jungvolk any longer. She had not given

birth to him for that. "He has no time for anything," she stormed. "No time to read a book or practice his piano lesson. Just marching up and down till he is worn out, and all for nothing."

His memory of the scene was vivid. It had happened in the shop the evening of the day that little Emil died. He had come home late for supper, exhausted and excited, and had told them all about it, but not blaming anyone nor referring to the fact that the leader had been harsh with them. That was something he had learned as long ago as that: not to criticize authority.

His mother had begun to cry and then she had stood up with flashing eyes. He had never seen his mother look nor heard her speak like that and for one dreadful moment, as he watched his father's frowning, sullen face, he feared that she would have her way,—that he would be an outcast like a Jew, or regarded as a weakling. He could not give up the Jungvolk. He would rather die than that. The tears were burning in his eyes.

"No," Herman Raeder said at last, striding up and down behind the counter swinging his empty

sleeve. "Let him stay in the Jungvolk. Life is hard enough the way it is."

What exactly had his father meant by that? He had not thought or cared much at the time, just so he knew that he was going on with all the other boys. But one day in the cobbler shop he had questioned his grandfather about it.

"So?" Old Anton pushed his glasses back and smiled. "Everybody is afraid of everybody else, Stephan, and—half of them are mad." And he went back to the shoe that he was mending without saying any more about it.—Veal and shoe leather. . . .

Well, he had gone on with the Jungvolk, with his friends and his companions, all the boys of his own age who were not Jews or cripples,—tramping over dusty roads and muddy ones, over meadows and plowed ground, in sunshine, rain, and snow. And it had been fun—a lot of it. . . .

The motors slowed and idled. The song that he was singing died in his throat. Were they already there?—so soon? He jerked his wrist up to his face. One-thirty-five. Five minutes, that was all, since Werner had been there. He saw the flashlight on the floor a little way ahead. The sergeant was still

giving his instructions. They were still singing the same song. . . .

The motors roared again but the sound was different now. It had a whine with which he was familiar. Well yes, of course. His heart stopped beating on his ribs. They had slowed to change the pitch of the propellers. The blades were biting deeper in the air. They were over the frontier and climbing higher in the sky, out of danger from the ground. Yes, they were climbing steeply. Perhaps it would be smoother higher up. Lurch—roll—The tail whipped like a rope and threw him back against the wall. Somebody must be sick by now. He sniffed the air. . . .

“Stephan—”

“Yes?”

“Sing something else.”

“Oh! Yes, all right.” But he had smelled something this time—or did he just imagine it? “Sing now, you fellows!” And he sang, but his thought fled back into the past. . . .

One, two, three. One, two, three.—He was sitting on a red plush piano stool which had been turned up as high as it would go; his feet could

barely reach the pedals. The room was a small and cozy parlor with painted china lamp shades and pictures on the wall in big gilt frames. And there was an odor in it from the curtains and the carpet. . . .

"Ach now!" he said aloud. "Why do I think of smells?" He sniffed. Yes, there was something in the air; it was not imagination. He shook his head, breathed deeply through his mouth. He had always been sensitive to odors. . . .

"One, two, three. One, two, three." A young and pretty lady was sitting close beside him, counting while he played—the very piece that he was singing now. Well, naturally, that was what brought it back.

Frau Becker was her name and she had come from Dresden not very long before, to this small industrial city where he lived. She was a widow, but not much more than that was known about her, since she had no connections in the town. She had rented a small house and furnished it with things which she had brought from Dresden—quite old-fashioned things, but rather elegant. And then

one day a sign had appeared in the front window:
"Frau Becker—Piano Teacher."

And so, since his teacher, old Frau Schloss, was getting feeble, and also perhaps because the name of Dresden promised cultural advantages,—well anyway, he had been sent there to Frau Becker, and this was his first lesson, though not a lesson really, but a sort of review to determine how far he was advanced. And he had, at her request, played painfully and badly the few pieces that he knew. . . .

"One, two, three. One, two, three." He saw her from the corner of his eye. She wore a pretty dress and she was pretty too. Her hands were small and white. She was different from his mother or the mothers of his friends,—well, very much a lady.

"Thank you, Stephan, that was very nice."

He stood up awkwardly, picking up his music.

"Would you like a piece of cake before you go?"

"Oh no—"

"Oh yes, I think you mean," she smiled. "You are just being polite."

And she had gone out of the room and left him there alone, embarrassed and uncomfortable. And

while she was gone there was a knock upon the other door which led into the hall, and after a moment a boy had come in, a boy of his own age.

"Oh—" he said, surprised. "Excuse me—"

Stephan mumbled something, putting his music in the bag. The boy was just about his size, but thin and pale, not husky-looking in the least. He had black hair and quite disturbing eyes which were so keen they seemed to go right through you. And there was something in his face,—well, something like the captain's,—something that made you feel awkward and unimportant.

"Why, Paul—" Frau Becker returned with a silver tray with plates and chocolate cake and little napkins made of lace. She introduced them formally. "Stephan Raeder, this is my son, Paul. He is twelve, about your age, I think—"

"Yes—" Stephan shook hands. They sat on a sofa with Frau Becker between them.

"Now that we are settled," she went on, "Paul will start to school at once. Perhaps you will be in the same class."

"Yes—" Stephan said. He spilled some crumbs of

cake upon the carpet. He had never been more wretched in his life.

Frau Becker kept the conversation going. "Paul plays the violin," she said. She put her arm around her son and drew him close to her and Stephan noted with dismay that the boy did not frown nor draw away. "Perhaps you two could play together sometimes in the evening, if your mother will permit you to visit us."

"Yes—" Stephan said.

She talked on lightly, gaily, not in the least like the women that he knew—his mother's friends, his teachers, the customers that came into the shop. She was completely new to him, and terrifying too. When at last the agony was over and he stood up to leave, she put her hand upon his head and looked into his eyes.

"Paul is a stranger here," she said, "and he has not been much with children of his age. It will be a little hard for him at first in a new school. I should like him to be with the other boys, to join their games and do the things they do. Perhaps you can help him, Stephan."

"Yes—" Stephan said.

"Thank you." She smiled and added earnestly and wistfully—yes, wistfully was the word, "I hope you will be friends."

"Yes—" Stephan said.

Paul had gone with him to the door but neither one had spoken until he was outside upon the step. Then he had faced about and raised his arm.

"Heil Hitler."

"Heil Hitler," Paul had answered, heels together and his shoulders straight. . . .

Well, he had not helped him and they had not been friends, not at the start, not for a long time. It was difficult to say just why. Perhaps because Paul was so good in school, getting the highest marks without apparent effort. Perhaps because the girls had liked the sensitive, solitary boy who could look you in the eye as if he did not see you—as if he did not know you were alive. Yes, the girls had liked him—Martha too, and no doubt he had resented that, though of course he had not thought of Martha then except as a playmate of long standing.

"You are a pig," she said to him one day coming home from school, stopping in the snow to stamp

her foot. "That's why you act this way, because you are a pig."

She had asked him to her birthday party and he had refused because she had asked Paul. He had not really meant it but he was hurt and angry now.

"Paul Becker is a sissy," he had jeered.

"He's not. It's just because he is a gentleman—"

"A gentleman!" He laughed. "A sissy and a coward—"

"Oh!" Her cheeks flamed and the tears came to her eyes. "I hate you, Stephan Raeder,—hate you, hate you, hate you. I'll never speak to you again."

She snatched her books out of his hand and flounced off down the street and for two or three days they met as strangers.

But Paul was not a sissy nor a coward and he had not believed it when he said it. And Martha did not hate him, and he had gone to the party in her home above her father's bakery shop. He had gone to all her birthday parties since he was old enough to walk. And there would be a cake, a very large one such as people had for weddings, with a statue of Martha in the center made of colored sugar, and candles all around. Adolph Hauser made this cake

himself and took great pains with it. He was both a baker and an artist. And the little statuettes were carefully saved and put away, one beside another on a shelf in a glass case. There were eighteen of them now.—No, he had not missed her birthday party yet. . . .

And Paul had become his closest friend, not through any incident or effort but gradually and slowly, as real friendships are made. The chances were that they had liked each other all the time, but had been unwilling to admit it. At all events they did become inseparable. And then it was Martha who was jealous, not in a sentimental way but merely because she felt left out.

“Where are you going, Stephan?” she would ask.

“To Paul’s.”

“Oh—” And she would toss her head.

“Well, come along.”

“Two’s company.”

“Nonsense.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Nothing. Practice a duet—”

“You two.” A little wistfully.

"Well, look, let's try something, the three of us. You sing and we'll accompany you."

"Oh no, I don't sing well enough."

"But you do,—much better than we play." Enthusiastically, "See now, we'll really work on things that we can do together."

"Well—" Doubtfully.

"Frau Becker will be there and she will help us. Afterwards she'll give us cake and coffee." They were old enough for coffee now.

And that was the beginning for the three of them—Martha, Paul, and Stephan—of summer afternoons when they went hiking in the woods, or rode their bicycles on long excursions in the country,—of moonlight nights when they sat, or lay stretched out in the grass beneath the stars, singing and talking endlessly;—the beginning of so many winter evenings in Frau Becker's cozy parlor, softly lighted through the painted china lampshades, with Frau Becker, young and pretty, chatting graciously and lightly,—evenings of song and music, and deep discussion too, of the world in which they lived, of the future of their Fatherland. . . .

He could see Paul pacing up and down the floor,

his black hair rumpled and his eyes like points of flame, and he could hear his high pitched, passionate voice.

"Imperialism is a brutal thing. Exploitation and repression are essential to its objects. And we have been the victims,—denied access to the world in which we live, hemmed in and starved by a race of shabby shopkeepers. We must crush this conspiracy of thieves which is aimed at our destruction. They are unhappy unless we are hungry. Well, we will tear their world apart under their feet, and make it over, all of it,—a decent world in which to live."

And he could see Frau Becker sitting on the sofa, silent as she nearly always was when the conversation turned to politics. But this time she had spoken, though almost timidly.

"But, Paul,—will it be different then?"

"Different, mother? What?"

"I mean, will imperialism be a different thing?—Will it be less brutal, Paul, when it is ours?"

"Yes, of course," he said with that fine air of finality with which he settled things.

"But—why?"

“Why?” And he had smiled indulgently. “Why, because we are not Jews. We are Germans, mother.”

“Oh—” And Frau Becker had gone out of the room to get the coffee.

Yes, he remembered that as if it had been yesterday. It was in fact three years ago and only a few days before the thing had happened. . . .

They were no longer children. They had long since graduated from the Jungvolk into the Hitler Youth, which was somewhat the same but much more serious. They still tramped with their packs in dust and mud and rain, but now there seemed some purpose to it all. Defensive Sport games of their childhood had developed into military tactics and they carried in their knapsacks other things than stones.

Paul was highly thought of in their group, but not popular with many of the boys because he was aloof and because he was too good at doing things. The kind of things he could do, he did brilliantly. He was not much use to dig a trench or carry sacks of sand, but he was an excellent marksman and in fact had won a medal. Nobody else could read a

map so quickly or so readily find his way without a compass. He could memorize terrain almost at a glance, and accurately sketch it half an hour afterward. No one was more tireless or more enthusiastic; more devoted to the Führer and the Fatherland. . . .

It was raining that morning,—a cold, gray, drizzly day. He had gotten up at five, when it was scarcely light, and hurrying into his uniform, black trousers and brown shirt, had made himself a cup of coffee, thinking every moment while he stood there in the kitchen that he would hear Paul's voice call him from the street. Yesterday at school they had agreed to meet and go together to the armory which served as headquarters for the group. There were to be maneuvers simulating actual warfare, which would consume the day. It was an occasion of importance. The commander of the group, Police Lieutenant Weber, had informed them that an S.A. man would be detailed to observe and report on their performance.

Paul had not come and at last he had gone on, running half the way, for by now he was afraid he would be late. The armory was in commotion,

everybody rushing here and there. He had questioned several boys. "Have you seen Paul?" and they had answered no. And then, as he was falling into line— It was curious, the feeling of alarm that he had had which was out of all proportion to the matter, a sort of premonition of disaster. Well then, as he was falling into line, he had asked another boy, a disagreeable fellow whom he had never liked.

"Hey, Schmidt, have you seen Paul?"

"Paul who?"

"Paul Becker."

"Becker!" the boy grinned nastily. "You won't see him around here any more."

"Why not?—What do you mean?"

"Don't tell me you don't know. Everybody knows."

"No, I don't know. What?"

"He's fooled us for four years,—ever since he came here."

"Fooled us?—about what?"

"Don't be so dumb. Paul Becker is a Jew."

"You're a liar," Stephan said, and he hit him in the face and knocked him down.

He had not really known what he was doing—as if his arm had acted by itself. Police Lieutenant Weber had come striding to the spot. He could see him standing there with amazement in his eyes, chewing on his pipe stem as he did when he was very much annoyed. He was a veteran of the war, with gray hair and mustache, and a fragment of shrapnel in his hip which made him limp—a stern disciplinarian, but a kindly person underneath.

“Ach now, what is all this?”

He had not answered anything because he was crying and was afraid that he would sob. Hans Schmidt had gotten up and was dusting off his clothes. The boys had gathered round in a wide circle.

“Go into my office, both of you.”

And they had gone, standing far apart against the wall and not looking at or speaking to each other. Presently old Weber had come in with an S.A. man behind him—a young, brisk, snappy fellow, who had not said anything at first but had sat down near the door and listened. And Weber had sat down behind his desk, looking very stern and chewing on his pipe.

"Now then—" He fixed his eyes on Stephan.
"—what is this all about?"

"I hit him, Herr Lieutenant."

"So?—You hit him?—Why?"

"I should prefer not to answer, Herr Lieutenant."

"I order you to do so."

"It—it was something that he said about my friend."

"Yes?—Who?"

"About my friend, Paul Becker."

"What did he say?"

"I—" The tears were welling in his eyes again. He was terribly afraid that he would sob out loud. "I should prefer not to answer, Herr Lieutenant."

"I order you to do so."

"He said—" His eyes were blurred with tears. "He said Paul Becker was—a Jew."

"And then you hit him, Stephan?"

"Yes, Herr Lieutenant."

"So?" He turned to Hans. "Does this statement of the case agree with yours?"

"Yes, Herr Lieutenant."

"Good. You may go."

And Hans had gone out of the room and there had been a pause, old Weber's fingers tapping on the desk as if he did not know just what to say or do. . . .

"I am sorry, Stephan," he had said at last, "but what Hans said to you was true."

"True, Herr Lieutenant?" The sob burst in his throat.

"You may sit down, Stephan."

And he had sat down by the desk, crying like a baby now, not able to control himself at all.

Paul's father was a Jew, old Weber had explained, and so notwithstanding that his mother was a gentile, the boy was Jewish too. The father had been a doctor of medicine in Leipzig. He had died six years ago when the boy was ten years old, and the mother and son had moved to Dresden. There, among strangers and living very quietly, she had managed to conceal the truth from everyone, including her own son. Then something had alarmed her and she had moved from Dresden to this small Westphalian city where she hoped that her secret would be safe. But a few days ago she had been seen and recognized upon the street by

someone who had known her long ago in Leipzig. The Gestapo had been notified and an investigation had been made.

"The sins of the parents—" Old Weber sighed. He had been fond of Paul. "Well, that is all—"

"One moment, Herr Lieutenant—" The S.A. man was speaking and Stephan rose quickly to his feet. "I am familiar with this matter. Last night the Becker house was visited and a complete confession was obtained. The boy is a Jew and, by concealment of the fact, the mother has been guilty of a crime for which she could be severely punished. The boy's uniform, obtained by false pretenses, was taken from him." He paused and came quite close to Stephan; his voice was hard and dry.

"I do not like these tears—a sign of childish weakness unworthy of a Hitler Youth. You should not grieve; you should rejoice that this Jew has been discovered and cast out. No matter who he is, how innocent he may appear, his blood is tainted. He is a menace to the Führer and the Fatherland." He paused again, tight lipped and stern of eye. "Take care now what you do—how you conduct yourself.

No weakness." He clicked his heels, flung out his arm. "Heil Hitler."

"Heil Hitler," Stephan answered and fled out of the room.

The day was like a dream; he could not remember anything about it. Toward dark the maneuvers had been finished and he had gone home. It was still cold, with drizzling rain. When he came into the shop his father, silent and taciturn as ever, had handed him a letter without comment. He had read it in his room, a narrow little den in the gable of the attic.

"Dear Stephan:

Please come to Paul. He needs you.

Helena Becker"

He had not gone to Paul, nor sent an answer to this note. He couldn't, that was all. Twice in that sleepless night he had got up and started to put on his clothes, only to take them off again and toss and turn wide-eyed upon his bed. Something was stronger than himself. He couldn't go—couldn't—couldn't—couldn't—

Next day he had stayed home from school, say-

ing he was ill. And he was ill in fact, but—not so ill as that. They had not asked him any questions. Once, sitting in the kitchen staring at his untouched plate, his mother had leaned over him and put her hand upon his head—as if she understood and wanted to do something. But she had not said anything. And what was there to say?—He couldn't, that was all.

Late in the afternoon Martha had come in. She supposed he didn't know and she had come to tell him. She had learned of it that day and had gone straight to Frau Becker after school. But she had not seen Paul, who was locked up in his room. It was too horrible, she said. Frau Becker looked and acted like someone who was dead. Martha's eyes were red; she had been crying.

"I knew it yesterday," he said.

"You knew it?—yesterday?"

He nodded.

"And you have not been there?"

"No—" He shook his head.

"But, Stephan—why?"

"He is a Jew."

"He is your friend."

"I can't," he shouted angrily. "Well, you don't understand. I can't."

"Do you mean, you are—afraid?"

"Afraid?" He jumped up so quickly that he overturned his chair. "Are you calling me a coward, Martha?"

"Oh, Stephan—Stephan—"

"Well then, what do you mean?—I am a German, a member of the Hitler Youth. I know my duty to the Fatherland."

"I am a German too," she said, and she had looked into his eyes until he turned away his head. "I love the Fatherland, but I could not be true to it if I were not true to myself."

"Rubbish!" he stormed. "You are a girl and you don't understand. True to yourself?—and what is that?— No, no, the Fatherland comes first."

And she had stood there looking at him with an expression in her eyes which he could still recall—could never quite forget:—pity and sorrow and—contempt. He had gone on talking loudly. If one did a thing like that, then where was one to stop? Compassion overflowed in German hearts. One must steel and discipline one's self against acting on

such feeling. Failure to be strong could wreck the German nation as it had done before. Weakness was a crime. The Führer had foreseen the danger and therefore there were rules which might seem stern and ruthless but which were necessary all the same.

She had not answered anything at all, and finally he had no more to say. He had stopped shouting now.

"And so now you see the reason, Martha—the reason why I couldn't go."

No answer.

"Perhaps sometime—"

"No." She shook her head. "It is too late, Stephan." And she had turned away and gone without another word.

But she had been right about it; it was too late even then. There had been just one moment for response. He had not told her of Frau Becker's note, and he had never told her. Though what difference did that make?—It was too late, and that was all.

Next day he had gone back to school, weak kneed at the thought of meeting Paul, of coming

face to face with him. What should he do? What should he say?—But he might have spared himself the trouble, might have known how it would be. It had happened in the corridor, going from one class to another. He had seen Paul coming toward him—the slender, graceful figure with white face and rumpled hair, head held high, eyes looking straight before him—striding quickly with his books beneath his arm. His heart had jumped and twisted. . . .

“Paul—” He stopped and half held out his hand.

And Paul had looked at him, straight in the eye, as if he did not see him—as if he were not there, and had passed by.

It had gone on this way for several days, and then one day Paul did not come to school and it was noised about that he had been dismissed from the Gymnasium. Jews were not permitted in the school and action of this sort had not been unexpected. Another day or two and then. . . .

He was eating his breakfast in the kitchen when Martha burst through the shop into the room.

“Paul is dead, Stephan.”

“Dead—” He stood up, stunned and helpless.

"Yes, dead—" she sobbed. "This morning when his mother went to call him, he didn't answer her. The door was locked. She had to get a man to break it down. And he—" She sank into a chair, her face upon the table among the dirty dishes.

"Ah God," he said. "Martha, don't—"

Paul had hanged himself in the closet in his room which held his clothes. He had used a leather belt and stood upon a stool to make it fast across a rafter. And he had left a note upon his desk. Frau Becker found that first.

"I am sorry, mother dear, but I can no longer live in such a world."

He had not gone to the funeral. No one had. There had not been any funeral. Just a hearse. But Martha had been there, had stayed with Frau Becker through it all until she went away, back to Leipzig or to Dresden. He had never known or asked. Neither he nor Martha ever mentioned Paul. But for months he had waked up in the night and seen Paul's eyes looking at him—looking through him. . . .

Ach now, why must he think of things like

that?—Such things happened, that was all,—and what good was it to speculate about them?—What could he have done?—What was there to do? It had always been too late to mend that matter. Martha's point of view was different because she was a girl,—unrealistic and emotional. Such weakness was natural in a woman and allowances were made for it. What was it she had said?— “I love the Fatherland, but I could not be true to it if I were not true to myself.” The words had haunted him for a long time. He had been afraid of something—of yielding to weakness, he had said. But was it that or—something else? He had not been able to make up his mind. He had thought of asking his grandfather about it, but had been careful not to. He had kept out of the cobbler shop—had gone and come from school on the far side of the street. He had not wanted to know what old Anton thought about it.

Well, the old man was now dead and could answer no more questions. Paul and little Emil—veal and shoe leather. . . .

The motors cut and idled, and he was back again inside the plane, alert and tense and waiting in the

dark. The air was smoother now; he had not noticed any violent bumps for a long time. Instinctively he sniffed— Yes, someone had been sick, someone nearby. He breathed quickly through his mouth. Why were the motors idling?—what were those fellows doing up in front?—The ship was gliding steeply, almost silently, backfiring now and then to let you know it was alive. The sudden quietness was startling and unreal.

He saw the flashlight crawling forward. Well, Werner would find out what this was all about. They had lost their way perhaps. These Luftwaffe men were always doing things like that. With all their talk of navigation, half the time they had no idea where they were. Even flying contact with the ground they got mixed up and missed their objectives entirely. Careless, snooty fellows—

“Attention!” Werner shouted from the cockpit. “Check your harness and equipment.”

Ah God, so that was it!—He had known it all the time, not wanting to admit it and hoping something else. His hands flew to the buckles, felt along the straps—the rip cord grip,—the little balls of death nestling like eggs against his breast,—tin hat

and Luger, wire cutters, compass, knife and map, the flashlight hooked onto his belt—all in order, everything—

“We bail out at one thousand meters. The sky is clear with broken clouds. Light fog on the ground. No wind to speak of. The drift will be southwest.”

It was cold; his teeth were chattering. He pulled his padded helmet down and strapped it underneath his chin.

“Remember what I told you:—the landing gear is not retractable. Don’t hurry with your rip cords; take your time. I will go first; Cat will come last. Be ready for the word.”

Lurch—jerk— His head went back against the wall. They were coming down into rough air. The Luftwaffe men would be pleased about that; they were always pleased when someone was uncomfortable. The plane whipped sideways with a creaking shudder and then dropped out from under him. His stomach churned. The sickening smell enveloped him; saliva gathered in his mouth. He must think of something else. . . .

—the enemy is in retreat. Our purpose is to get

behind him and cut off his escape. Our objective is this bridgehead which we must take and hold so that he cannot cross and get away. If we fail we shall be annihilated.—Yes, yes, that was enough of that.—Roll up your chute and tie it and leave it where it fell. If you meet wire, cut it. If in a half hour you do not reach the river, stop where you are and stay there until it is light enough to see.—Just sit there in the dark—alone, all by yourself. He caught his breath. The captain might do that, with his glass stuck in his eye and his shiny leather boots, not caring in the least what happened next, but for ordinary people made of flesh and blood—well, that was something else. And suppose, when it was light, there was nothing to be seen—suppose that you were lost. . . .

“Stephan—” Karl leaned back against his knees.

“Yes?”

“Well, almost there.”

“Almost—” He did not want to talk, even to Karl. It was too late for talk. They would only just begin and then—

“Remember Dr. Heinkel?”

“Yes, of course.” The picture flashed before

him:—the funny little man with a white pointed beard, standing in the doorway of the hut with the snow all piled around it. “What made you think of him?”

“I don’t know. Something he said.”

“Something?—What?”

“That he couldn’t kill a rabbit if he could see its eyes.”

“Oh! Oh yes—”

The motors roared again and he was glad. He did not want to talk,—no, not even to Karl. The racket ebbed a little. They were throttling down as slowly as they could to hold their altitude. It was strange, all the things that you could tell from sound. The ship began to bank in a wide circle, rolling and skidding in the choppy air. . . .

Dr. Heinkel. Funny to be thinking of him now. —It was in his year of Voluntary Labor, almost two years ago. He had been sent to Pomerania, a lonely land of forests very far from home,—farther than he had ever been before, like another world. They were clearing and draining marsh land for an airport—hard work at any time but bitter in the winter when the snow was on the ground.

One Sunday afternoon, early in their friendship before they knew each other very well, they had gone skiing, he and Karl. It was not much fun because there were no hills, and they had gone on through the forest farther than they realized, hoping to find a decent slope. And then the darkness had come on and they could not find their ski tracks in the snow.

They were completely lost and beginning to be frightened when they saw a light flickering through the trees. They hurried forward eagerly and came upon a little hut of logs and knocked upon the door which was opened in a moment. And there he stood, with his white pointed beard and wrinkled face, smiling at them pleasantly. . . .

A blast of cold, fresh air whipped through the plane. They were opening the hatch. It was a hatch and not a door. He could tell from the feeling of the draft. The floor was breaking open in the middle and the sides were lifting up, like those things that were in sidewalks. The Luftwaffe men took care of that. One of them touched a button in the cockpit and the thing began to open—very slowly. And then he touched another one and it

would close again, slowly as the ratchet wound around. That was all there was to that. And nobody need move until he saw the light—the debar-kation light, a dim blue bulb above the open hatch. . . .

“Dr. Heinkel,” he had said. “Dr. Ludwig Heinkel, professor of philosophy, University of Jena.—Professor emeritus,” he had added hastily, almost as if he were apologizing. “But excuse me please, young gentlemen, come in. Welcome to my house.”

They had gone in and introduced themselves, a little confused and ill at ease, expecting to be greeted by a wood cutter. The hut was barely furnished but in spotless order:—bed, table, chairs, a shelf of books—and, hanging over it upon the wall, an old-fashioned fowling piece. In one corner was a stove with a big iron kettle, from which came a most inviting odor.

“You have been skiing, gentlemen. And you have lost your way. I see, I see. But do not be concerned. The road is not far distant. I can direct you to it presently. But please be seated now and warm yourselves.”

They had sat down near the stove with watering mouths, sniffing the air, speculating in their minds on what was in that iron pot. They were hungry boys and they had not smelled food like this for a long time. The food in the labor camp was monotonous and bad.

"But excuse me please again. I am not accustomed to visitors any more and I forget myself. As the hour is so late perhaps I can persuade you to have supper with me—" Their hearts had leaped with joy. "But I warn you, young gentlemen, I have not much to offer—just a very simple dish which I prepare myself."

"Oh, thank you—" they had said in the same breath. "Thank you very much." The old gentleman had set the table, chatting all the while, and then had filled their plates from the big kettle.

"Rabbit," Stephen cried. "Rabbit stew."

"Yes, rabbit—" He smiled at the expression of their faces and then seemed suddenly embarrassed and alarmed. "But I ask you not to mention it. I live alone; my wife is dead. I do not teach any more. I am not, so to speak, in sympathy—" He stopped abruptly, staring at his plate, then hurried

on confusedly. "Please don't misunderstand me. I take no part in political discussion; I have no fault to find. It is just that I am old and no longer interested in matters of that kind. I am quite alone, you see. I have retired from the world."

"Yes—" They nodded sympathetically, but they were beginning to suspect that the old man might be a little cracked.

"But we Germans love our meat." He laughed uncomfortably. "And so, now and then,—not often but occasionally, I take my gun down from the wall and go hunting for a rabbit." He looked at them anxiously, almost pleadingly. "I ask you please not to refer to that."

"Oh no—" they assured him, busy with their plates. They had never tasted more delicious food.

"You understand of course that the rabbits are not mine. They belong to wealthy landowners with whom I am not acquainted—people of importance who do not like to have their rabbits shot. I am in fact, young gentlemen, a poacher."

He need have no fear, they laughed. They would not tell on him.

"I thank you very much." He seemed somewhat

reassured. "I am, as you can see, an old man, and quite harmless. But I have not been always understood, and I have suffered greatly from the fact,—disaster—tragedy, indeed—" He stopped again; he had not touched his plate. "My wife was taken ill in consequence and I could not go to her because I was—detained— Well, well, we will not go into that. But I would not injure anyone. I assure you that is true. It is even hard for me to hurt a rabbit." He watched their faces anxiously. "That surprises you no doubt, but indeed it is a fact:—I could not kill a rabbit if I could see its eyes."

Yes, that's what he had said. It was wonderful how much you could remember in a moment—all the things that came racing through your mind. . . .

There it was at last—the dim blue light, as far off as a star. He felt Karl's groping hand and gripped it tightly for an instant. "Good luck," he said. But there was nothing to be said or heard against the motors—through the helmet which was strapped across his ears. He got upon his knees, feeling for the boot heels of his friend, crawling close behind him. The ship was tossing like a cork, whipping from side to side, but the air was clean and fresh

and he would not be sick. It was too late for that. One meter was behind him; five or six meters more. There was still time to think of things. . . .

Dr. Heinkel had gone with them to the road, carrying an oil lantern and talking all the way. He did not agree, he said, with most authorities on the origin of man who had not, as was commonly supposed, ascended from the apes, but from some timid and affectionate creature which had lived in trees long, long ago. There was a wealth of evidence to support his theory, but man was, himself, the strongest argument, since he was by nature peaceful, affectionate, and—afraid.

“But excuse me please, young gentlemen, and kindly disregard what I have said. Such ideas are not—popular, and no doubt I am quite wrong.” He had shaken hands with them and made a little bow. “Good-bye. Please come again some day.” And as they started down the road with their skiis upon their shoulders, he had called after them: “Young gentlemen!—Perhaps you will be good enough not to mention you have met me—”

“No,” they called back, “we won’t.”

And they had not mentioned it, not to anyone at

all. They meant to go again the following Sunday, but something intervened, and it was several weeks before they had a chance. They found the place quite easily, but the little hut was gone—burned to the ground. The stove was sticking up out of the snow, and, prodding with their ski sticks they found the iron kettle. But that was all, not another thing. They never knew what happened and they had never asked. The old man was of course a little mad. . . .

The blue light was very close. He could begin to see things,—the upright spar beside the trap, and Otto's hand upon it—the pilots' backs beyond, against the lighted instruments. The blast of air was like the surf; it took his breath away. There were three left. He saw Otto pull himself erect and—vanish.—Like a gallows, it had always made him think of that. Mechanically he crawled another step. There was still time. . . .

—but man was, himself, the strongest argument, since he was, by nature, peaceful, affectionate, and—afraid.—Well, *afraid* could be admitted,—there was no question about that. For the rest he couldn't answer. Dr. Heinkel had been mad, but

perhaps not very mad. It was difficult to say. . . .

The plane dove sharply and fell off on one wing. —Karl was gone. He had not turned his head. And now there was one left,—himself, Corporal Cat, a person of authority. He drew himself erect against the spar, fighting for his breath. . . .

—some timid and affectionate creature which had lived in trees. A tree-shrew, he had called it, whatever that might be,—half squirrel, half rat,—sensitive and alert. . . .

Something flapped and bellied beneath the open hatch. He neither saw nor heard it, but in some way was aware of it. Something had gone wrong, —someone had fouled, was snagged there underneath the ship. He knew it and his heart stood still. He waited, clinging to the spar, staring down into the blackness.

The motors cut and idled. One of the pilots stumbled back,—a boy no older than himself, with a black mustache such as the Führer wore, and eyes that didn't see you—like the captain's.

“What are you waiting for?” he shouted angrily.

“Something—” Stephan said, pointing through

the hatch, but he said it to himself and really made no sound.

“Are you going out—or *back*?”

“Back—” He stared; he could not speak. He was paralyzed with terror.

“So?” The pilot smiled contemptuously and turned away, waving his arm to his companion.

The motors roared again. The hatch began to close,—the doors were coming down, jerking slowly toward the floor. In a moment it would be too late.

“Wait—” He tore his hand loose from the spar and stepped into the sky. . . .

2

WHEN STEPHAN Raeder stepped through the open hatch he fell into a net,—a tangled web of rags and broken ropes trailing in the slip-stream of the air close against the belly of the plane.

The accident was an uncommon one. The ship circling slowly in a shallow bank—a maneuver designed to land troops in close contact on the ground—skidded in the choppy air and stalled. The pilot nosed down sharply to regain control and snagged upon the landing gear an opening parachute whose pack had been too quickly broken out. It was this tattered wreckage streaming back under-

neath the hatch which Stephan had not seen but somehow sensed.

He did not know what happened when he stepped out of the plane. Instinctively he had begun to count:—one—two— And then he was enveloped and hurled against the fuselage as the pilot pulled the ship out of its dive. Something struck him in the head and reality took flight. He was back again in the nightmare of his childhood,—walking on a path of smooth white sand at the bottom of the sea,—running from the shadows on the walls. . . .

When Stephan was in his seventh year he was seriously ill with an obscure disease which Dr. Bergner said was a result of malnutrition. He had never been a robust child and important items had been lacking from his diet. There were periods when milk was unobtainable and when an egg could not be had at a price which was possible to pay.

He had vague recollections of his mother going early in the morning to the country on the train, taking with her from the shop a garment or a piece of cloth or something, and coming home at night

exhausted but triumphant, with a bulging petticoat. And he would shout with joy because he knew that in the pockets she had sewn underneath her dress to escape the observation of envious friends and neighbors, and perhaps of the authorities, for there were rigorous laws about such matters,—that in these pockets there would be things to eat: fresh vegetables, an apple or a peach,—something that a farmer's wife had hoarded and was willing to exchange for a bonnet or a dress. His earliest memories were of things like this,—of being hungry.

At all events he was delicate and puny, and when he began to go to school, almost always tired,—too tired for his lessons or for games. He grew thinner and whiter and finally really ill. And then he lay all day upon a cot by the window in the room where his mother and his father slept. Martha came to see him sometimes after school and they would color picture books with crayons or cut things out of paper; his mother read to him from story books when she could be spared out of the shop or was not busy in the kitchen, and occasionally his grandfather, old Anton, came to call and would sit beside the cot and tell him stories. The

days passed pleasantly enough and he quickly grew accustomed to his invalidism. But the nights were horrible, and when the shadows deepened in the evening he would tremble with fear at the thought of what he knew would come.

His sickness was accompanied by a fever and his temperature rose sharply in the night. And then he was the victim of hallucination,—a recurrent nightmare which repeated itself endlessly without any variation, and which was to return in later years whenever he was ill or deeply troubled in his mind. . . .

He was walking on the bottom of the sea along a narrow path of smooth white sand confined between high cliffs of brightly colored coral. The scene was very beautiful indeed. There were strange shrubs along the path with great red leaves swaying gently in the crystal water, and lovely flowers growing in the walls, and undulating vines. Little fish with gold and silver scales frisked about him gaily, not frightened in the least, and other friendly creatures crawled upon the sand among multicolored shells. It was light and it was warm, a joyous, happy place,—but there was evil in it.

At intervals black shadows on the cliffs marked the entrances to caves and grottos in which lurked hideous monsters, hidden in the dark, waiting his approach. His heart would stop as he drew near, for he knew he must go on. And he would run as fast as he could go past the cavern's mouth, not daring to look back, expecting every instant that something would leap out and clutch him from behind. And then at last he would be safe, could breath again, and he would slow his pace until he saw another shadow on the wall.

This was repeated many times or few. There was no rule about it. But he always knew how it must end, and so every aspect of the dream was charged with terror. Sooner or later it would happen:—a whip-like tentacle, slimy and soft but strong, would coil around his leg and trip him up, and as he clutched at it to tear it off another one would wrap around his arm. . . .

He tore and clawed at them, and stuff like ink poured out of the wounds turning the water black so that he could not see. He broke one loose,—another took its place,—another and another, until his legs were bound, and then his arms against his

sides, tightening across his breast,—and then at last around his throat. He could not move or scream, and he was strangling. . . .

“Mamma—” he moaned, choking, tearing at the bedclothes, as he had always done. “Mamma, help—” He was awake but the thing around his throat remained. He found it with his hand and tore it off,—a broken end of rope that had wrapped around his neck. Now he could breathe again. But still he could not move; his legs were fast and something held him down.

“Mamma, put on the light—” And then he was aware that he was not in his bed at home but somewhere out of doors. The stars were darting crazily in the sky,—over him and under him. The wind was like a hurricane and he was swinging in it, whipped back and forth, and rolled and tossed with sickening spinning motion so that the sky encircled him. He thought he heard the motors of a plane, and then he saw the flame from the exhaust and the shadow of the ship against the sky as it swayed in and out between him and the stars. But still he could not orient himself,—remember what had happened,—where he was.

Bewildered, sick with vertigo, he closed his eyes, and suddenly it all came back:—the open hatch, the pilot's sneering face with his little black mustache, the angry voice:

“What are you waiting for?”

He had not answered that,—he, Corporal Cat, a person of authority. He had stood there like a fool, frightened and confused, unable to explain the source of his alarm—something he had not seen but somehow felt.

“Are you going out—or *back*?”

And he had gone, against his instinct and his will,—afraid to go, afraid to stay, afraid of the disdainful smile upon the pilot's face,—yes, terribly afraid. But the doors of the hatch were coming down, and he had gone,—had stepped into the trap. And what had happened then. . . .

“Ah God—” He knew the answer now:—he had ripped his pack too soon and had been caught. This thing in which he hung, netted like a fish, was the wreckage of his chute. There was nothing to be done; he was as good as dead. . . .

He had seen it happen once, standing in the air-drome:—a ship with something dangling under-

neath, like the rags you used for kite tails,—and the officers all watching through their glasses. His captain had been there, leaning with his elbows on a post as if he had been looking at a horse race. The plane circled over them so low that you could see the huddled figure swinging out below the tail. Sirens screamed. The ambulance went tearing by and then the fire engine, ready for the crash which could hardly be averted.

The pilot came in low and very fast, yawing dangerously from the dragging torque behind him. Just before he reached the runway he swooped down suddenly across a wire fence and sheared the wreckage off as cleanly as a knife blade. The huddled figure struck the earth, bounded high into the air and disappeared behind a cloud of dust. The plane came on and landed without damage,—only the tail wheel had been torn off.

He had looked at his captain to see how he would take it. The boy who had been killed was from his company though not from Stephan's section.

"Very pretty," he had heard him say to another officer. "Very neatly done." And he had put his

glasses in the case and strolled away, slapping his shiny boot with the little stick he carried. . . .

Very neatly done!—Well, that was all they cared.—He saw himself, a huddled figure, dangling in the air,—sheared off upon a fence, bouncing like a football on the ground, and a kind of frenzy seized him. He could not die like that, uselessly, for nothing,—dragged and beaten on the earth until he was no more than blood and rags. How would his mother feel—and Martha?—No, no, he couldn't die like that. There must be some way—something.

The hatch!—If they could let a rope down and haul him up to safety. They must know he was there, that something was. The ship would yaw and skid. Yes, he remembered that. But would they care enough to bother?—To save themselves perhaps.—If only there was some way he could signal,—let them know that he was there—alive.

His flashlight!—Yes, of course, the very thing.—Frantically he felt around his belt. The torch was gone. But what was this?—this thing upon his back?—His senses reeled again. He was afraid that he was dreaming,—afraid to explore it with his hand lest it should disappear or turn into something else.

—He touched it timidly and felt along the edge, and his heart leaped in his breast.—There was no mistake about it:—his chute was safe upon his back—the pack unbroken.

He had not ripped the pack too soon,—had not ripped it at all. This net in which he was entangled was not the wreckage of his chute, but of some other one,—the thing he had not seen but somehow sensed. Life was not finished yet, and he need not be dragged and beaten on the ground until he was a shapeless lump of flesh, if only he could extricate himself,—discover what was holding him.

The wind was terrible; he could not breathe against it. The icy blast flattened and pinned him down, got beneath his helmet and tried to tear it from his head, sliced through the openings in his clothes as if to rip them off, was everywhere against his flesh. And the vertigo was horrible, fantastic and unreal,—the dizzy flight of stars around his head and the rolling, plunging shadow of the plane which was now here, now there. His stomach churned, his mouth filled with saliva; nausea could no longer be suppressed and he had no will to fight it. He gagged and vomited, hardly know-

ing that he did it. Every thought and every atom of his strength was engaged with something else,—the desperate effort to escape out of this net of tangled rags and broken ropes.

He must orient himself before it was too late, determine his relation to the wreckage which confined him. It seemed that he was fastened on his back, lying so to speak head forward toward the course of flight. He was certain this was true, for, faced against the wind, he would have strangled. His head was higher than his feet, and there was something out beyond him and below him which jerked and twisted like a fish upon a line. He could feel the pull of it across his shoulders and his back. But there were so many ropes and flapping rags, and sometimes he was on his face or standing on his head. Everything was changing and in motion; nothing would be still a single moment.

Groping with his hand he found a rope close to his head which it seemed might be the key to his disaster. It was taut as wire cable and it seemed to be snagged in the harness of the chute pack on his back. He found it again below the snag and tugged at it in vain, but here too it was taut and would not

yield, as if some heavy object was suspended out beyond him. He pulled and twisted but without result.

His knife!—He felt for it in panic.—Thank God, it was safe.—It took a while to get it out, and then his fingers were so numb with cold that he dared not try to open it and had to pull the blade back with his teeth. He gripped it tight and sawed at the rope above his head, then stopped in sudden terror.—No, no, that wouldn't do, for he would still be fastened to the wreckage underneath,—the thing that jerked and pulled. A hideous thought flashed through his mind:—could there be someone else hanging there beneath him?—waiting to be dragged and beaten on the ground?—He drove the thought out of his mind; he had no time to waste, every moment was important.

He found the rope behind his back and sawed upon it frantically. It was no easy task. Half a dozen times he was twisted out of reach and had to start again. The rope was tarred and tough; it resisted him like wire.—Someone?—Who?—He could not keep the thing out of his head.—There was no one there of course, but if there was—then

who?—Richard or Paul or Mark,—anyone out of the section,—even Werner could be caught though in fact that wasn't likely. But there was no way to tell. And if Werner was the one, then he, Corporal Cat, second in command, would be needed on the ground.—Someone.—*Who?*—Well, anyone but—Karl.—There, it was out: the thought he dared not think.

“Not Karl,” he shouted to himself. “Not Karl; that couldn't be.”—Otto perhaps, nervous and afraid. He had been cautioned many times.—Yes, Otto was the one—if anyone at all. He had pulled the rip cord sooner than he should. That was it of course. He had done those things before and the captain had spoken to him sharply on more than one occasion.—Well, such things happened, that was all; and no one was to blame.—The blade of his knife was deep into the rope. Suddenly it parted and the end of it lashed back around his arm.

His knife!—It was gone, dropped from his startled hand. And he was not free—yet, but, released from the weight that held him down, tossed madly like a cork in the tangled rags and ropes. Like the

tentacles that bound him in his dream, there was another,—and another,—around his legs, caught in his belt. He tore and clawed at them, and then he dropped head down out of the net, held only by an ankle, swinging like a pendulum. The noose that held him slipped, slid through, and he was free at last, and falling—falling—

Ah God, the joy of it!—This was something that he knew, was well accustomed to. Head up or heels,—it didn't matter now. If you shut your eyes you couldn't tell the difference. The rushing air was music in his ears. He was free;—not to be dragged and beaten on the ground,—not to be watched by someone leaning on a post, as if it were a horse race,—not to have it said: "Very pretty. Very neatly done."

His thoughts raced by more swiftly than the air, but underneath he counted slowly:—One—two—three— There was no need for hurry; a thousand meters was a lifetime in the air.—It was funny how that nightmare had come back. When he fell into the wreck he must have been unconscious for a moment, and the ropes, like tentacles of course,—the one around his throat— Four—five—six— That

illness of his childhood so very long ago:—the cot beside the window that looked out into the narrow street, and Martha sitting there beside him,—a pretty little girl with flaxen hair, coloring picture books and cutting paper dolls.—Seven—eight—nine — He felt for the handle of the rip cord, gripped it tightly.—And oranges,—big yellow oranges— Ten — He pulled with all his strength—

An agonizing instant of suspense, then something screamed and whistled from his back.—Wait now,—chin down, knees up, arms tight across his breast.—Crack—like the explosion of a shell:—the chute had opened, caught the air.—A shattering, dislocating jerk, and then—he was sitting in a comfortable chair, swinging widely in the sky. The stars were overhead where they belonged; the motors of the plane had faded out of hearing.

“Good!” he said aloud and was startled at the sound of his own voice, it seemed so long since he had hear it,—heard anything at all except the howling wind. He trimmed the ropes with deft and sure hands, pulling a little here and easing there, until the oscillation was reduced to a gentle swinging motion, and then he looked around.—Sky clear

with broken clouds.—Well, there they were,—drifting shadows blotting out the stars.—The wind?—He picked a star and watched his chute against it. The air was very still.—Fog upon the ground.—He looked down but there was nothing underneath except the empty night.

“Good!” he said again. It was wonderful to be alive when you had been so close to death.—Had he ever been so close to death before?—Perhaps in that sickness of his childhood.—They had said so anyway. And suddenly he saw before his eyes—big yellow oranges and Uncle Rudi’s face. He laughed aloud. It was strange how one thought led to another.—Well, there was time to think and nothing else to do with it. You couldn’t hurry to the ground; it came to meet you very slowly.—Yes, there was time to think of Uncle Rudi, and it was nice to think of something pleasant. . . .

He was sitting in the shop on a stool behind the counter. He was so small that he could just see over it. He had been a little better of his illness and permitted to be up and play around the house though still quite weak and listless. And sometimes

he would sit there in the shop when his father had gone out and his mother was busy in the kitchen, and if anyone came in he would quickly run to tell her. He was sitting there this day—it was in the afternoon and almost dusk—when a shiny automobile stopped before the door and a great big man got out of it and stamped into the shop.

“Hello—” he bellowed in a terrifying voice, and then he looked around and saw the child behind the counter. “Say now, who are you?”

“I will call my mother,” Stephan gasped and slid off the stool but the big man swept him up and stood him on the counter.

“Never mind about your mother. Who are you?”

“Stephan—”

“Stephan what?”

“Stephan Raeder.” He had never been so frightened.

“So? That’s exactly what I thought.” The big man laughed until the whole room shook. “And who do you think I am?”

“I—I don’t know, sir—”

"You don't know, eh? Well, that's a nice idea, a pretty situation. I'm your Uncle Rudi."

"Oh—" Stephan stared with eyes as wide as tea-cups.

"You've heard of me perhaps?"

"Oh yes, sir—" And indeed he had heard of Uncle Rudi all his life, since he had heard anything at all,—his mother's only brother, Rudolph Krohl, a legendary hero like someone out of a book, who had gone off to America before he had been born.—Oh yes, he had heard of Uncle Rudi.

"Well, that's something anyhow." The great man laughed again and picked him up as if he were a feather and hugged him in his arms until he was nearly smothered, and then he stood him back upon the counter and looked him over critically. "But see here now, what's the matter with you, eh?" Stephan did not know what to say and had no breath to speak. "You're skin and bones. What's wrong with you?"

"I—I have been sick—"

"Sick?" The big man scowled alarmingly. "I'll bet you're hungry, eh?"

"Hungry—" Stephan shook his head.

"Well, I know better. I bet you have been hungry all your life. Answer me this:" He thumped the counter with his fist. "Do you eat an orange every day?"

"Oh no—" An orange?—every day? Stephan was appalled at the idea. But perhaps Uncle Rudi was just joking. And so he smiled and said a little proudly, "At Christmas time I have an orange—"

"Ach God! At Christmas time! So that's the way of it!" He stamped up and down the floor muttering to himself, and then suddenly he snatched Stephan from the counter and sat him back upon the stool behind it. "Don't you move till I come back," he said, and he rushed out of the shop and banged the door.

And he had sat there waiting, frightened and confused, but also thrilled and happy.—Uncle Rudi.—It was difficult to say how much he had really known about him then, when he was only seven, and how much he had learned in later years from family conversation. There was, for example, the amazing account of Uncle Rudi's exploits in the war—that war in which Stephan's father lost his arm and the hope to be a dentist.

Uncle Rudi had not lost an arm nor anything at all, not even his good nature. Stephan, as a child, always saw him as a giant, charging like a bull with a tree trunk for a weapon, and bellowing at the enemy in a terrifying voice. And though this picture was no doubt a flattering one, Uncle Rudi, by all accounts, had done his share of fighting and had been decorated twice for conspicuous acts of gallantry. He had fought for four long years without a scratch and without much complaint except about the food which he said he would not offer to a pig. He was an enormous eater and something of a cook as indeed he was a little bit of everything.

In the end, as he put it, the whole thing became a nuisance. He knew that he was whipped and he was tired of the war, but he did not know how to get out of it. It was in this frame of mind that, returning from a raid, he captured his first and only prisoner, an American soldier who was hiding in a mud hole. "Come out of there," he bellowed, and the man came out with his hands held in the air, looking like a nigger he was so black with mud. "Who are you?"—"I'm an American."—

“So?” Uncle Rudi roared with laughter. “If you could see yourself you would say you were a liar.”—It appeared that Uncle Rudi could speak a little English. “Well anyway, you are my prisoner.”—“So I see,” said the man and he took a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket and suggested that they have a smoke.—“Thank you,” Uncle Rudi said. He lighted his and shouted with amazement, “Ach God, this is tobacco!”—“Naturally,” the prisoner smiled. “We always smoke tobacco in America.”—“So? Is that a fact?”—They walked along with the prisoner in front and Uncle Rudi’s bayonet pointed at his back. Uncle Rudi was absorbed in thought. At length he inquired carelessly:

“How do they feed you over there?”

“Oh, well enough—”

“What do you have for breakfast?”

“Ham and eggs with bread and butter—”

“Butter, did you say?”

“All the butter we can eat.”

“Oh!” A pause. “What do you have for dinner?”

“Dinner?—One thing and another—”

"Well, for example, what did you have yesterday?"

"Yesterday?—Now let me see.—First we had a thick soup made with liver dumplings—"

"Liver dumplings, yes,—and then?"

"And then ham hocks with sauerkraut—"

"Ham hocks with sauerkraut, you said?"

"And, oh yes, potato pancakes with brown gravy—"

"Potato pancakes,—yes, I see." They walked along in silence for a while. "Excuse me please, but do you ever have paprika schnitzel?"

"Paprika schnitzel?—Frequently."

"And do you have roast goose with apple sauce?"

"Regularly every Sunday."

"So?" They walked a little farther and then Uncle Rudi stopped. "Excuse me," he said, "we are going the wrong way."

"The wrong way?—What?"

"If you please—" Uncle Rudi held his gun out to his captive. "If it's all the same to you I should like to be your prisoner."

That was the story as Uncle Rudi told it with

minor variations, roaring with laughter and completely unashamed. Doubtless it had grown with the years but the fact itself remained:—he had been made a prisoner and had formed such an attachment for his captors that, when the war was over, he returned with them across the ocean and became an American himself, and had never come back home until today. . . .

The shop door was thrown open and Uncle Rudi reappeared, bearing in his arms a huge paper sack of oranges.

“There now,” he shouted, rolling them out upon the counter, “an orange every day,—you understand?”

“Yes—” Stephan breathed in rapture.

“Good! And soon you will be strong,—perhaps as big as me.”

As big as Uncle Rudi!—Well of course that had not happened, but the truth was that his illness mended quickly from that moment.

Uncle Rudi had remained for several days, not living with the family or his father, but in the best hotel where he occupied the bridal suite with a private bath attached. He was like a restless

giant, always stamping in and out at unexpected moments, banging doors and bellowing, and spending money right and left as if it had been water. He bought expensive presents for them all and took them out to restaurants, and on one occasion Stephan went along to dinner in the big hotel which he had never entered in his life before and whose luxury and magnificence rendered him completely speechless. That was at least a dozen years ago, but the memory was so vivid that it might have happened yesterday. . . .

There was his mother in her Sunday dress, thin and care-worn as she had always been within his memory, not quite at home in these surroundings, smiling timidly at Uncle Rudi's noisy jokes; and his father with his empty sleeve pinned up at the elbow, looking at his plate and not saying very much; and his grandfather, old Anton, in his stiff, black Sunday coat, with his stubby cobbler's hands folded on the table and his spectacles pushed up above his nose, filled with pride no doubt but not likely to admit it; and Uncle Rudi towering hugely in his chair, perfectly at ease, shouting at the wait-

ers who came running to his side from all directions.

"Bring now the goose with apple sauce!"

The goose with apple sauce! Strange to remember that.—And the goose had come at once, crisp and brown and tender; the table groaned with food and bottles of choice wine. He had never seen so many things to eat.

"The Fatherland!" Uncle Rudi roared. "Pfui!—you understand?—I should waste my time with a country where I haven't got a chance,—where the coffee's made of barley,—where my sister's child doesn't get enough to eat."

Stephan held his breath. He thought that lightning might descend and strike Uncle Rudi dead, but nothing of the kind occurred.

"I'm not a German," Uncle Rudi said. "I'm a citizen of the United States. Here is my passport." He took it from his pocket and shook it in the air. "I've got fifty thousand dollars in the bank,—not marks, you understand, but silver dollars."

"Do dollars grow on trees?" old Anton asked in the way he had when he was being quizzical.

"Yes, father, in America they do." And Uncle

Rudi laughed until the glasses rattled. "I go out in the morning with my basket and pick them off the branches."

"Ach, Rudi—" Stephan's mother said.

"I assure you, Minna, it is true. I am what is called a speculator on the Stock Exchange. I buy little scraps of paper and the next day I sell them for much more than I paid."

"But suppose the price goes down?" Old Anton asked.

"Pfui!" Uncle Rudi shook his head. "In America everything goes up."

Yes, he remembered that, or perhaps only remembered having heard it told of later. But there was one other thing out of that evening which was etched very deeply in his memory. It had come later in the meal when he was full of dinner and beginning to be sleepy, but it had frightened him and perhaps that was why it was so clear. . . .

"I'll tell you what I'll do—" Uncle Rudi was leaning with his elbows on the table and shaking his big finger. "I'll take you all back to America with me,—all four of you."

"No—" Old Anton smiled. "I am a German, Rudi, and I am too old a dog to learn new tricks."

"Minna?"

But Herman Raeder answered for his wife. "My arm is buried here and so am I."

"Come now, we'll all be rich together."

"No," Herman Raeder answered angrily, and he struck a wine glass with his knife and shattered it. The wine ran out upon the cloth.

He could see again the frightened look upon his mother's face. She had reached out to touch his father's hand and then had drawn back.

"So be it." Uncle Rudi laughed. "But look here, one thing more: give me the boy,—let me take Stephan back."

"Stephan?"

He could still hear his mother's startled cry and see the shocked look in her faded eyes, and his father sitting there staring at the wine spot on the cloth. These were the things that he remembered best out of that night, and the terror that had gripped him,—terror, ecstasy, suspense, all mixed and crowded in a moment.—What would they say?—Should he be let to go?—or sent away?—with

this fabulous great man, on a ship across the ocean to that strange and distant land where oranges and dollars could be gathered in a basket,—away from home, his little room, his mother and his friends,—away from everything he knew, the security of childhood.—It was wonderful and terrible.

“Rudi, please—” his mother said with her eyes upon his father.

“No.” Uncle Rudi pounded with his fist upon the table. It was likely that he was a little drunk. “I am serious about this thing. If you want to live in poverty, crowded in and starved, fighting for your lives like maggots in a cheese,—well, that’s your affair; you’re old enough to choose. But give the boy a chance. The best he can hope here is to be another soldier, like you, Herman, or me. Don’t let him come to that. Don’t let him waste his life the way you wasted yours. Send him to America where he can have a chance,—where he can keep his arms—”

His mother had reached out her hand again but his father brushed it roughly from his sleeve and suddenly stood up.

“You fool,” he said. “You fool!” And he took

Stephan's hand in his so tightly that it hurt, and strode out of the room without another word, so fast that the little boy was running, and down the street into the dark and empty shop. And he picked the child up in his arms and pressed him fiercely to his breast and kissed him,—and his father's cheek was wet with tears.

He had lain awake a long time in his bed, shivering at the memory of these terrifying things which he had not understood,—perhaps not even now. . . .

He started suddenly.—Where was the ground?—All these things he had had time to think about, and yet he was still swinging in the air, fluttering gently downward like a leaf. The stars were twinkling in and out behind the broken clouds but the empty night beneath him was as black and deep as ever.—A thousand meters should not take so long.

It was no longer cold and he was not uncomfortable. He was conscious that his head ached, and he found that his helmet had been ripped and that there was a lump upon his head and a small cut in his scalp. His fingers were sticky from the

blood. It was really nothing; a metal eyelet in the wreckage might have done it or a buckle of his harness when he broke his pack.

But it was strange he heard no other planes,—and had heard none except his own. Of course there must be many, and fast fighting ships for convoy. They would not be expected to stop the fleeing enemy alone, just twenty of them.—He smiled at the idea but felt a little shiver on his spine.—No, there must be several hundred men at least, though of course you never knew about these things. You were told what to do and that was all. But the High Command looked after everything; they knew what they were doing and they seldom made mistakes. It was safe to leave the matter in their hands.

Still, it was strange:—the soundless void.—He strained his ears to listen, and then laughed at his alarm.—What nonsense!—The thing was very simple:—his section may have been among the last, indeed the final one, and hundreds of his comrades were already on the ground. It was a reassuring thought:—all these boys beneath him, of his blood and of his mind, not enemies but friends who

loved him, whom he loved,—with whom he was one.—And Karl—

“Yes, Karl of course—” he said aloud and struck down something rising in his thought. . . .

Uncle Rudi had appeared the following day as usual, banging the door and bellowing an apology. It was the wine, he thought, though he meant what he had said, but would guard his tongue not to refer to it again. And then he had announced that he and his nephew were going to a circus.

“A circus—” Stephan trembled. Could this really be?

“But the child has been sick—” his mother said. His heart sank to his shoes.

“Pfui!” Uncle Rudi roared. “A circus is the very thing he needs.” And then he turned to Stephan as if the thing were settled. “Perhaps you would like to invite a friend to join us?”

“A friend—” Stephan nodded earnestly.

“Well, who?”

“Martha,” he had said.

Yes, Martha.—He had always wanted Martha, though there was of course last year— But that was something else, not to be thought of now, not ever

to be thought of any more. Karl had seen to that,—good, loyal Karl, his friend.—He had always wanted Martha, all his life, since they were tiny children. Nothing had ever been quite complete without her. . . .

They had gone to the circus—the first circus of his life—and marveled at the animals which they recognized from pictures in their books, and thrilled at the performers standing up on bareback horses or flying through the air on the trapeze, and laughed until their sides ached at the clowns; and then they had come home with their pockets filled with candy, laden down with presents,—exhausted but supremely happy. Inside the dingy little shop Uncle Rudi had picked him up and stood him on the counter, just as he had done on that first day.

“I am going back home to America tomorrow.”

“Oh—” He was sorry but too happy to be sad.

“Listen to me, Stephan, and remember what I say:—Don’t let them make a soldier out of you. Killing people is a stupid business; it never settles anything.—Try to remember that.”

“Yes, Uncle Rudi.”

“Good!” And he stamped out of the shop, banging the door behind him.

And he had not come back, not ever since that day twelve years ago. Some months went by and then there was a letter. His mother read it at the supper table,—read it aloud. It had been read so many times he could remember every word.

“Dear Minna:

I am busted higher than a kite as we say here in America. Not a single cent is left. Father was right. I am a fool. Nothing goes up forever—not even in America. But I don't blame the country. It's my fault. I think I shall go to California though it's quite a way to walk. Don't worry about me. I've still got both my legs and both my arms, and I'll get along all right. I'm sorry I can't send you a present for your birthday. Give my love to father and to little Stephan.

Your loving brother

Rudi”

“A fool and his money—” Herman Raeder said.

It was one of the few times he had seen his father smile.

Uncle Rudi.—He had had a vision of him stamping his way across the world to California, over deserts and mountains, through impenetrable forests, clothed in a bear skin, brandishing a tree trunk, and bellowing at Indians who fled out of his path.—Of course Uncle Rudi had been a little mad, but all the Krohls had funny streaks in them,—they were not realistic about things:—old Anton with his notions,—and his mother, though she seldom raised her voice,—and even he, himself, obsessed with doubts sometimes,—not always being sure.—Else why should he remember all these things?—things that had somehow burned their way into his mind and were always coming back to haunt him.—Don't let them make a soldier out of you—

Well of course that was absurd. Somebody had to rule the world and had to win the way to it,—somebody wise and strong. And how could it be won except with war? And who was qualified, with sacrifice and hardship, to bring order out of chaos?—whom had God appointed to this task?—

He had learned the answer when he learned his letters,—in the class room, in the pulpit, the Jung-volk, the Hitler Youth, the Labor Camp, the Army.—The German people had been chosen and anointed; it was their highest duty to themselves and to humanity. And yet. . . .

“Ach, what?”—The stars were gone and he was wrapped in warm, wet, inky darkness. The fog had crept up gently and enveloped him. But it was more like rain than fog; already it was trickling down his neck and soaking through his clothing. The ground could not be far off now. A hundred or two hundred meters more and he would be among his friends—

But suppose— The drops of water on his neck turned suddenly to ice.—Suppose he was not where he thought he was.—How long had he struggled in that net of rags and ropes?—His eyes flew to his watch:—a quarter before three. He stared at the hands in stupefaction. The last time that he looked it had been half past one, a little after that. But he had not thought to look before he left the plane. And how long ago was that?

He calculated feverishly.—Near two o'clock had

been the zero hour in his mind, a little sooner or a little later—you could never tell exactly—and Werner had confirmed that, but afterwards they climbed, and then they had come down; all that had taken time. And there could have been a head wind which they had not counted on; the roughness of the air suggested that. And they may have been much higher than they said. Those Luftwaffe fellows liked to fool you if they could,—even Werner might have been, for reasons of his own, a party to deception of this kind. He had certainly come down more than a thousand meters. And that took time.

His pulses smoothed.—There was no other explanation. He had stepped out of the ship and for a moment lost his senses,—but only for a moment. The shock of falling in the net had stunned him for an instant; there was nothing there to hurt him.—Yes, that was it.—And then— How long had he been cutting at that rope?—It seemed like a lifetime but it couldn't have been long.—He had gotten out his knife and pulled it open with his teeth, and reached behind his back— Two minutes—three perhaps— He caught his breath.—Three minutes

equals six kilometers.—No, no, that was assuming that the plane was on its course in level flight. It would take time for that. Encumbered with the wreck the ship would not respond; it would yaw and skid against the torque. And the pilots would have known that something had been snagged, and they would have gone on circling for a while, hoping that it would come loose.—Yes, that was exactly what had happened. It accounted for the way the stars had raced around his head and the awful rolling motion.

He breathed again.—What nonsense!—His friends were there beneath him or—they couldn't be far off. He would find them if he walked a little way. His torch was gone; it would be dark in this soaking, dripping fog, but the ground was flat and open and he knew his compass course. . . .

The earth shot up and struck him unprepared, so hard that his knees were jammed into his chest. The chute, freed from his weight, jerked him off his feet and dragged him on his back. He twisted quickly on his side, captured the ropes and deftly spilled the air out of it. The fabric swooshed and flapped and then collapsed, silent and inert.

“Ah God—” He scrambled to his knees and crouched there panting, clinging to the ropes as if he feared the chute might come to life and get away.—Corporal Cat!—Corporal Donkey was more like it. He had not made such a landing since he was a raw recruit,—had never made a worse one. It was good that it was dark, that his captain had not seen him tumbling like a clown and dragging on his back,—his captain watching through his glasses, leaning on a post, or he might be close by, within a dozen paces, hidden in the dark.—He waited, listening, half expecting to hear the aristocratic voice with its thin edge of contempt: “Very pretty, Raeder. Very neatly done.”—Frogs were croaking, not another sound.—Yes, well— He sighed with relief and disappointment.

Roll up your chute and tie it and leave it where it fell—

Yes, that came next. It was not easy in the dark. The cloth was wet and slippery and it seemed to have no shape, but at last he got it heaped together and looped the ropes around it like a pile of dirty laundry. He was kneeling in a puddle. This was not fog but rain, a steady, soaking drizzle, and not

warm except by contrast with the sky. His clothing was wet through and drops of water trickled down his face.

He got upon his feet and instinctively felt for his equipment. His tin hat and his Luger,—both were gone, torn off no doubt when he was struggling in the net. He had no weapon now except the hand grenades strapped in the canvas bag upon his breast. Those little balls of death were safe and snug. You pulled the pin out with your teeth and threw the thing which would explode on contact. You could kill just as far as you could throw, but beyond that they were harmless, of no more use than eggs.—His knife,—gone too, dropped out of his hand when the rope whipped round his arm.—Well, that didn't matter much; the knife had served its purpose.—His wire cutters and his map,—both safe, though the map would be worthless in the dark,—still, it would be daylight sometime,—not very long, but an interminable time when you thought of the things that could happen in a minute.—His food,—yes, it was there, three days' supply compressed in little cubes.—Three days!—

That seemed ridiculous.—His first aid kit?—His compass?—Thank God that was not lost.

The next thing is your compass. Direction is south-east—

His hand was shaking so that he had to put it down upon the ground to still the trembling phosphorescent needle.—South-east was there— He pointed with his arm.—But where without a bearing? The moment that he moved he lost all sense of direction.—He had been trained to find his way at night, in fog, in rain, when you couldn't see your hand before your face, but never by himself—alone. Always there had been someone on his right and someone on his left, within whispering distance of his voice.—And yes, there might be now.—How stupid that he hadn't thought of that!—All the fellows of his section, grouped here waiting for him—

“Karl—” he called softly, and then a little louder, “Karl—” He waited a long time. “Oh Karl, it's Stephan—” Only the frogs replied.

No, they were not there; they had gone on without him,—not far of course,—just far enough to be beyond his voice—

We should come down within a circle of a hun-

dred meters. But if someone should be detached—

Detached!—Yes, that was it.—He could hear his captain's voice explaining drily: "Parachute troops represent a new technique of warfare. They operate as islands in a hostile sea of enemies, depending not on numbers for success but on surprise and shock and unity of action." He had paused to stroll along the line, tapping his shiny boot. "We can expect no quarter from civilian population and so it is important not to be—detached."

"Detached—detached—" Stephan muttered to himself.—But if he hurried he could overtake them.—Why was he wasting time when every moment was important?—If he held the compass in his hand and kept his hand from shaking— He took a cautious step,—another and another.—Yes, it was possible.—The ground was flat and open and—

If in a half hour from the time you start to walk you do not reach the river—

He glanced at his watch:—five minutes before three.—It might take a little longer by himself,—groping in the dark against the rain.—There was something reminiscent about this,—something he had done before,—some other time, alone and cold

and wet, in dark and rain.—The sodden ground gave way beneath his feet and he floundered through a ditch, knee deep in mud and water, and waded out upon the other side. The frightened frogs awoke and croaked shrill protest.—He had not hurt himself, no harm was done; a little water more or less when you were already drenched.—He went on slowly a few steps and found himself against a wire fence with pricking barbs.

If you meet wire, cut it—

Five strands,—he counted them and cut them, and heard them sing as they curled back.—It was strange that his comrades had not cut them when they passed, but he brushed this thought aside. One panel in a fence was like a needle in a haystack.—He went on step by step, a little faster now, through meadow grass which swished against his legs and clung wetly to his ankles. It was really not impossible at all. Blind men walked in utter darkness; they put their feet down firmly, unafraid.—Unafraid!—That was the thing that counted.—And suddenly the memory he had stirred came crowding back. . . .

He was trudging along a country road at night

and in the rain, pushing his bicycle beside him. It had no light unless you rode on it to generate the current, and he could not ride because a tire was flat. The tire had been punctured by a bullet—

But that was near the end, when fear had given place to bleak despair, when he felt in his heart that he had lost her, that she was gone out of his life forever. And he had trudged along the slippery road as he was trudging now, with the cold rain beating in his face, and the horror of the thing he had just seen swimming in the night before his eyes. But there were a lot of steps that had come down to this. . . .

That year in the Labor Camp— Well, things had stirred in him, naturally enough; he was eighteen, had grown from a boy into a man. Then he had known for the first time, or differently at least, that he wanted Martha for his wife,—wanted to hold her in his arms, to press his lips to hers, to sleep at night with her body close to his. There were women near the Camp, kept there for the purpose, some of them quite pretty and attractive. But he had not gone to them as most of the others

did,—and he had never done this in his life. Karl had laughed at him.

“What are you afraid of?”

“Nothing,” he smiled. It was in the early days of their acquaintance and he was stretched out on his bunk in the cheerless barrack room, with the great dim oil lamps hanging from the rafters. “It isn’t that.”

“Then what?”

“Oh well—” He had not wanted to explain, afraid lest he be thought a childish, sentimental person. But Karl had been persistent.

“Don’t be a miser, Stephan. It only costs two marks to learn your way about. And if you are liberal with a tip or a handful of sugar from the kitchen, why then—” He grinned and winked his eye.

“No, not tonight.” He shook his head. “Maybe another time.”

“You’re a funny fellow.” Karl sat down on the bunk. “Say now, have you got a girl at home?”

“A girl?” He was too startled to deny it. “Well then, suppose I have—”

“Have you got a picture of her?”

"Yes—no—" he stammered. "Just one that was taken long ago when she was a child."

"Show it to me, Stephan."

"Well—" Reluctantly he took a leather wallet from his pocket,—the same he could feel now against his heart. The picture it contained was of a little girl with flaxen pigtails tied with ribbons. Karl looked at it and smiled.

"She promised to be pretty. Has she kept her word?"

"Yes." He nodded earnestly.

"What is her name?"

"Martha."

"Oh, Martha.—Are you going to be married?"

"Naturally, sometime." But he had never really thought about it in that way before, not definitely in words.

"Well now I understand." Karl handed back the picture. "No wonder you don't care about these chippies. I shouldn't in your place. But as for me—" He stood up laughing. "I haven't any girl and so I'm going now to buy a substitute for the small sum of two marks and perhaps a little sugar on the side—"

Yes, that was the beginning of decision, of something that had been there all the time like a plant whose roots are growing but whose head has not appeared above the soil.—Are you going to be married?—Naturally, sometime.—A question never asked and never answered till that moment. The plant had suddenly appeared out of the earth with leaves and blossoms all complete; its existence could not henceforth be ignored. He had lain awake that night, and many nights to come, with thoughts that were like fire in his brain.—Naturally, sometime.—But was that true?—Did Martha know what he knew, feel what he felt?—Was this torturing ecstasy something that they shared or was it his alone?

He had tried to write to her a little that he felt but he could not seem to get it down on paper, and when he did he always tore it up. He was afraid that she might not understand, and it was difficult with someone whom you knew so well, to get out of the old deep worn groove. And so their letters had gone back and forth without much change. And he had told himself: "When I go home it will be time enough." And he had counted

the months, and then the weeks, and then the days. . . .

Croaking frogs.—Wait now!—Another ditch perhaps.—He slowed his step, approaching warily, feeling with his foot.—Yes, there, the ground slid down. He found the bottom with his toe and waded through the mud.—Another fence but this time in a hedge with thorns which scratched his hands and fastened in his clothes.—Five strands,—he counted them and cut them.—The hedge was thick but he pushed through with his arm across his face.—Meadow grass again, swishing against his legs and clinging to his ankles,—flat, open ground. No doubt a pretty country if one saw it in the sunshine,—green meadows with neat hedges and well kept wire fences, like the Fatherland—like home.

Yes, home.—They had gone home together, he and Karl, at the end of their year of Voluntary Labor. The country was at war but it had not made much difference in their lives. They had been well prepared, had expected nothing else; indeed they had always been at war, even in the

games that they had played as children in the Jungvolk. And now they were to have a brief vacation before they took their places in the army.

He had invited Karl to visit him. He had written much to Martha about Karl and had sent her numerous snapshots. Well, that was not surprising; for a whole year the two had been inseparable. And Martha had written about Karl as if he were a mutual friend, though sometimes with a little hint of sarcasm. "Tell Our Hero," as she called him, "that some very pretty girls are eagerly awaiting his arrival—" things like that. And sometimes Karl would scrawl a postscript on a letter: "Wait until you see me. I am young and handsome, not at all like Stephan." All in fun of course.

For months he had looked forward to the day when the three of them would be together,—the girl who was to be his wife and his best friend,—like those old days with Paul. But as the moment actually approached a shadow seemed to fall upon the pretty picture he had painted. He had not known where it came from. They were sitting in the train and almost home; his heart was beating very fast and his hands were wet with perspira-

tion. He kept rubbing the palms upon his knees—

“Will she meet you at the station?” Karl inquired.

“Naturally—” He smiled, but he was not even sure about that.

“And shall I kiss her too?”

“Of course.—Why not?”

It was then the thing had happened, though he could not say just what, but something like a shadow or a curtain had descended, and suddenly he felt himself surrounded and shut out,—frightened and alone.—Karl was stronger, taller, better looking;—Karl was gay, a clever, easy talker;—Karl was merry, careless, unafraid;—Karl was everything that he was not.

The train had come into the station.—There was his mother standing on the platform, and Martha near her side, scanning the passing cars with eager eyes, her soft hair blowing in the breeze and purple lilacs pinned upon her dress. She smiled and waved to him and ran along beside the coach—

He had meant to take her in his arms and crush her tightly to his breast and press his lips to hers and whisper in her ear, “I love you, Martha.” For

days he had thought of nothing else. But suddenly it had become impossible.

"Well, Martha—" And he had shaken hands and kissed her on the cheek and seen, not knowing what he saw, the bitter disappointment in her eyes. "This is Karl—"

"Oh, Karl—" And she had tossed her head and looked him up and down, and nodded slowly, smiling, "The Hero of my dreams! Why, Stephan, you have not told me half the truth about him." And Karl had laughed and kissed her.

He had turned to greet his mother and to hide the tears that welled into his eyes. The world of his dreams had been shattered into fragments. Of course the fault was his,—an incredible stupidity, but he had not understood that at the time. And the weapons that she used to defend her injured pride were unknown to a boy of eighteen years. He had no defense against them.

And so misunderstanding went on from bad to worse, day after endless day,—the three of them together and he—alone, shut out, helpless, hurt, confused, and then with gathering bitterness and anger. Nothing that he did or said was right. If

he liked a picture at the cinema Martha would say that it was tedious; once when he danced with her she told him he was clumsy; and sometimes she talked to Karl as if he were not there, and then he would sit in sullen silence or pretend that he was reading. At times like this he almost hated Karl.

"Stephan—" Karl spoke to him one night out of the dark across the attic room they shared. "What's wrong between you two?"

"Between us?—Who?"

"You and Martha."

"Why, nothing—" He stiffened in his bed; he could not talk about the thing, least of all to Karl.

"But I thought you were in love with her."

"Oh, we've grown up together." And he laughed. "We've always been like this—"

"You told me you were going to be married—"

"Married?—Well yes, perhaps,—sometime—"

"Oh!" There was silence for a while. "Stephan—"

"Yes?"

"Be honest with me please:—am I in the way?—would you rather I went home?"

"What nonsense!" he cried angrily. "That is

really too absurd, making something out of nothing—”

“Well—” Karl sighed. “I wanted to be sure.”

It was the following day the thing had happened. They had gone off on their bicycles, far into the country. It had been as uncomfortable as ever:—Karl and Martha riding side by side and himself dropping behind on one pretext or another. And then Karl would stop and wait for him, but Martha would go on as if she had forgotten he was with them. She had never looked so pretty and she was very gay, talking and laughing all the time or singing scraps of songs,—too gay to be quite natural. But she hardly spoke to him and then only to say something sharp or disagreeable—

“Do hurry, please. We can’t wait for you forever.” And when he had drawn up beside her, “Must you take all the path?” Or if he went ahead, “Do you think it’s funny, covering me with dust?” At lunch, which they ate beneath a tree beside the road, she had taken him to task for something he had failed to bring, and when Karl had tried to smooth it over she tossed her head and said quite

viciously, "Oh, Stephan doesn't care. He only thinks about himself."

Yes, it had been a wretched day, and when at last they started home there was growing in his heart, out of grief and shame and hurt, a bitter, sullen fury. She must hate him and despise him to treat him as she did. What other explanation could there be?—And the thought flashed through his mind for the first time that perhaps she was in love with Karl.—And Karl?—He bent low on the handlebars to hide his face.—Those questions he had asked last night!—Well, it was plain enough:—it was he who was not wanted,—who was in the way—

A motor car was coming toward them on the lonely and untraveled road, and the driver leaned out and motioned them to stop. It was a military car with three soldiers and a man from the Gestapo, a boy whom Stephan knew. He got out of the car to speak to them and explained that they were searching for two prisoners who had escaped that morning from the concentration camp which was nearby,—two political prisoners, one young man and one old, clad in prison garb and probably

skulking in the hedges by the roadside. Had they noticed anybody of that sort?

"No," Stephan said, barely having listened, and added that they would be on the watch. And when the car had gone Martha turned on him.

"On the watch—" she sneered. "Speak for yourself."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean—" Her voice was like a knife. "—that I had a friend named Paul, and that I do not work for the Gestapo."

"Yes—" That was all he answered, nodding slowly, staring at her eyes. He saw the fleeting change in the expression of her face but he did not understand it. He ran and jumped upon his bicycle and rode away from them.

"Stephan!" she cried, but he did not turn his head.

To taunt him now with that!—The smoldering resentment of confused and heartsick days burst into flame.—Karl, his friend, and Martha.—They were both calling to him now but he did not look around; he rode on faster.—He would not trouble her again, would not be trailing at her heels, the

victim of her hatred and contempt. He had been a stupid fool, he had believed in love, in friendship too. He had denied himself what other fellows had because he wanted to be clean—He laughed.—Clean to be trod upon and soiled!—Well, he was through with that,—with her,—with both of them.—He looked back now and saw that they were far behind but he did not slack his pace.

The kilometers sped by; the afternoon was waning and thunder clouds were gathering in the sky when he came upon a man standing in the road, a farmer with a hayfork in his hand who waved to him to stop.

“The prisoners from the concentration camp—” He was stuttering with excitement. The patrol had stopped and warned him, and then a while ago he had gone into the barn to milk the cow and he had heard something— He pointed to the barn which was lower than the road,—a stone building with stone walls which extended to the house and formed the barnyard. From where they stood they could look into it. And on the other sides were open meadows.

“A rat,” Stephan suggested.

"No, no." He had heard voices whispering in the hayloft, and then there had been silence. He had picked up his fork and gone out of the barn as if he had not noticed anything, and then he had waited in the road until someone should pass. The nearest telephone was in a Bierhaus, a kind of a resort some distance down the road, closer to the town, but his wife was at a neighbor's and there was no one to send.

"I will stop there," Stephan said, half listening and distasteful of it all.—But did he know the place?—the man objected. It was plain that he was frightened and did not want to stay there by himself. "Yes, yes," he answered, impatient to be off. He knew the place by sight,—a road house of unsavory reputation.

And then Karl and Martha had come up. But Martha had not come close to him or spoken. She had stood beside her bicycle across the narrow road, listening and watching but not saying anything, and though he barely glanced at her, he noticed that her eyes looked as if she had been crying. The man had explained everything again, concluding with the statement that he thought it would be

better if he were to go himself,—if someone would stay there and watch the barn—

“See now,” he urged, “I can tell the Gestapo exactly where to come, and I will not be long if I can take your bicycle.”

“My bicycle?” Stephan stared at him. And suddenly there was a vent for all that he had suffered. He would show her what he cared for her opinion, would justify the scorn which he had not deserved. “Why yes, the very thing,” he said defiantly. “Take it—” He thrust the bicycle into the farmer’s hands and took the hayfork from him. “I’ll stay here and watch till you come back.”

“Stephan—” she cried,—just that one word. He looked at her and saw her bite her lip.

“Ah no!” Karl took his arm. “Why should you mix up in such a thing?”

“Go on—” he motioned to the man.

“Stephan, please.—All right, we’ll both wait then.—I’ll stay with you.”

“No, you won’t.” He jerked his arm away. “Leave me alone,—mind your own business.”

“Stephan—”

“No, I tell you!” He was beside himself with fury. “Go on with her!—Go on!”

And they had gone, riding slowly down the road into the dusk. He stood there watching them with the hayfork in his hand until they disappeared from view, and then he remembered the business of the moment and jerked his head around to scan the barn. From where he stood he could look down into the littered yard:—manure piles and chickens scratching in them, a sow with young ones grunting in a corner of the wall. The door into the barn stood open. There were no other doors, the man had said,—just narrow slits of windows in the stone. Thunder was rumbling in the darkening sky and rain began to fall.

The crisis of his rage was past and he cast aside the hayfork with a gesture of revulsion. Why had he lent himself to such a thing?—hunting defenseless, half starved men,—men perhaps like Dr. Heinkel,—snaring them like rabbits in a trap. What was he thinking of? Fury had impelled him to this thing,—fury born of fear—weakness in himself.—But this was weakness now:—to sentimentalize about escaping prisoners, dangerous men no doubt

who were a menace to the Fatherland. Could it be weakness to be strong?—Her words came back to him out of the past:—"I love the Fatherland, but I could not be true to it if I were not true to myself."—The memory fanned his anger and he thrust the question from his mind.

What nonsense!—And then he found a solace for his conscience:—the whole business was absurd; there was no one in the barn. Would escaping prisoners whisper so they could be overheard?—Well, naturally they wouldn't. The farmer had imagined he heard voices. The patrol had alarmed him and in such a state of mind it was easy to misinterpret things: the rustling of the breeze, swallows in the loft, doves or pigeons cooing— Yes, that was it, of course. When you were frightened it was easy to imagine anything. . . .

He tripped upon a rock and barely saved himself a nasty fall.—Flat and open ground, he kept saying to himself, but it was no longer flat and had not been for some time. He was climbing, rather steeply he imagined from the tightening of his breath, and the meadow grass was gone. The earth was hard and pebbly, dipping up and down in little

gullies. He groped his way through one, over stones almost like boulders, and climbed the other side, and went on step by step, but slower now; every step must be felt for and explored. And he could not always keep upon his compass course because of the contours of the ground. Still, he was getting on; a kilometer or two must be behind him. It was still drizzling steadily. . . .

Yes, when you were frightened it was easy to imagine anything at all. He had disposed of the matter in this way and had gone on with his vigil since he could not leave the place without his bicycle. But he had not paid much attention to the barn; he had been engrossed in other things:—the expression of her face when he left her on the road, the sound of her voice when she called after him,—and the way she had stood across the road from them, watching and listening but not saying anything, which was not like her,—and the look of her eyes, as if she had been crying,—and the sound of her voice when she called his name again. —Perhaps she had been sorry for the way that she had treated him.—Well, it was too late for that.—The thunder had come closer and he turned his

collar up against the rain which was falling steadily now.

It was almost dark when he heard the patrol car coming back. And then the headlights struck him in the face and the car came screeching to a stop beside him. The farmer had telephoned to the Gestapo and they had got the word by radio and had quickly doubled back upon their tracks. The boy he knew explained this in a breath.

"Lucky you were here," he said.

"Yes—" Stephan nodded and stood there while they backed and turned the car until the headlights swept across the yard and framed the open doorway of the barn. They were so quick and business-like about it. One soldier had already run straightway to cover any egress from the rear, though none was possible. The others with their guns scrambled down the bank and scaled the wall into the yard. The boy who was in charge called back:

"Stay where you are, Raeder, and perhaps you'll see some fun."

"Yes—" Stephan said. His lips were dry and saliva was gathering in his mouth as if he might be

sick. He kept saying to himself, "There is nobody there,—pigeons or doves, that's all." He was standing near the car behind the lights. It was like being in a theatre with the lighted stage spread out before him.

And now the farmer had returned, pedaling breathless up the road, and when he saw what was going on, he cried out in alarm, and leaving the bicycle against a tree, ran quickly toward his house.

"Pigeons or doves,—that's all—" He watched the three walk slowly toward the barn in even line a pace of two apart with the muzzles of their guns pointed forward at the ground, like hunters in a duck marsh. It was so still that he could hear the clicking of the breech locks. He was like a person hypnotized; he did not want to look but he could not, for his life, have turned away his eyes.

"Pigeons or doves—" And then the thing had happened with electrifying suddenness:—two men ran out through the black hole of the door,—ran out like frightened rabbits,—one young man and one old, though of course he couldn't see that,—ran straight upon the soldiers—

"Halt!" The guns cracked on the word and one

went down with a high pitched, strangling scream. But the other one kept on, dodging between the soldiers, with his head bent low and his arms held up to shield it.

"Halt!" They faced about and fired toward the wall, but the light was in their eyes. The man climbed over it and came scrambling up the bank with gasping, whistling breath. He had been hit,—one arm hung limp and blood was streaming from his neck.

"Halt!" The guns kept firing. He staggered on another step or two, straight into the headlights, so close that Stephan could look into his eyes, though the man could not have seen him in the dark behind the light. He would never forget the expression in those eyes,—the terror and despair, the piteous agony of human need—

And then he sank down on the ground, crumpling like an empty suit of clothes. And he made a sobbing sound and a kind of quiver seemed to shake his body,—just as it had been with little Emil, in the Jungvolk long ago, lying in the grass beside the road— The guns had stopped by now.

“Raeder!” The boy was shouting from the yard.
“Are you all right?”

“Yes—” he answered, stepping out into the light.

“Good! You were in a dangerous spot.”

Neither doves nor pigeons, but one young man and one old, and the young man was dead now at his feet,—a heap of bloody rags sprawled in the mud and rain.—He spat the hot saliva from his mouth; he knew he would be sick but he could not will himself to turn away.

They came back with the old man slung between them like a sack. He could not walk, they said, because his hip was broken. Stephan did not see his face but only that his hair was thin and white. He was making little agonizing sounds like an animal that has been hurt,—like that animal perhaps that Dr. Heinkel mentioned, the father of Mankind, a timid and affectionate creature which once had lived in trees—

They put the old man in the car; the other one they wrapped up in a piece of canvas and tied him on the back behind the extra tire. They were quick and business-like about it.

"There is only room for one," the boy remarked.
"So the son must ride behind."

"What?" Stephan thought he had not heard.

"A father and a son."

"Oh—" He spat again to clear his throat. "What have they done?"

"A pair of bolsheviks or something,—traitors to the Fatherland."

"Oh—"

"Well, thanks, Raeder." He flung up his arm.
"Heil Hitler!"

"Heil Hitler—" Stephan answered and watched the tail lights of the car until they vanished in the darkness.—And then he had been sick,—had leaned against a tree and gagged and vomited. . . .

"Aie—" he groaned. A slippery stone had turned and wrenched his ankle. He stopped and stamped his foot to ease the pain.—Flat, open ground!—Well, it was neither, but a steeply tilted devil's pasture strewn thick with rocks, with clumps of thorny bushes which fastened in his clothes and scratched his hands, with stumps of scrubby trees which had been felled,—he could trace the axe scars with his fingers. For some time past he had

been moving at a snail's pace, groping his way with outstretched hands, painfully exploring every step. He had resolutely tried not to think about it, to keep his mind on something else, but— Again the rain drops on his neck turned into ice.

Suppose that he was lost.—There now, the thing had said itself in spite of all his effort. It was really a relief to get it out.—And, when you faced it, it was nonsense. How could he be lost?—A hair's breadth to the right or left might account for the terrain; flat and open ground did not stretch out forever. But the compass could not lie, and somewhere straight ahead—very near perhaps—were his comrades and his friends—

“Yes, and Karl—” he said aloud. His ankle had stopped throbbing and he went on again, but he was limping now. . . .

Not doves nor pigeons, but one young man and one old,—a father and a son— He had leaned against a tree and gagged and vomited. And then he had turned to get his bicycle which the farmer had left standing by the road, and had found a tire flat. He had the things to mend it but when he passed his hand around the rim he discovered with amaze-

ment that the tire was beyond repair. He struck a match and saw, or understood, that a bullet had ripped it into shreds.

And so he started homeward down the road, in the darkness and the rain, pushing the bicycle beside him. It had no light unless you rode on it to generate the current, and he could not ride because—

Yes, that was it. He had come back at last to the point where he began:—trudging along the slippery road with the cold rain beating in his face, and the horror of the thing he had just seen swimming in the night before his eyes. He had got back to that, down all the steps that led to it. But there were more to come; he had not finished yet—

A pair of bolsheviks, he told himself,—traitors to the Fatherland, plotting evil to the Führer and the State, but—a father and a son.—It was hard now to unravel the tangle of his torment.—What had they felt or thought in those moments at the end?—the old man and his son who had been a little boy, had sat upon his knee and clung tightly to his hand.—What would it be like to hear your father

scream when a bullet broke his hip?—to see your son rolled in a canvas and tied on behind the tire?

Such things happened, that was all.—He had kept repeating this like a sort of a refrain to his bitter, tangled thoughts,—splashing through the puddles in the road, pushing his useless bicycle, sobbing like a child aloud and unashamed, hysterical no doubt.—Well, such things happened. . . .

“Ah God—” He jerked back with a startled cry as the ground gave way beneath his feet, but his weakened ankle turned and he could not save himself. Down he went headlong, crashing through the underbrush which covered the steep bank, falling, rolling, shielding his head against an avalanche of stones that came pelting down behind him.

He lay there for a while clinging to a tree root that his hand had closed upon, breathless and stunned, afraid to move lest the earth should crumble under him. But he was at the bottom of the bank; the avalanche had stopped and only rattling pebbles broke the silence. At last he got upon his knees and then he stood, pulling himself up against a tree trunk whose wet leaves brushed his face. He was not hurt, just shaken up and bruised;

his ankle had been wrenched again,—it was painful when he set his weight upon it,—but there were no broken bones. He had been lucky.

He stood there holding to the tree trunk, still a little dazed.—Flat, open ground!—Well, he had missed it some way,—or perhaps they had not told the truth about it. They didn't always tell you everything.—But no matter about that, he must get on. It could not be much farther. He took a cautious step and then—his heart stood still—

The compass!—It was gone; there was nothing in his hand. He had held it there before him every moment of the way, had kept his eye upon it,—the phosphorescent needle shining in the dark. And now it wasn't there. He had dropped it when he fell and it was gone—

Yes, gone!—He stumbled a few steps, slipping on the stones and clawing at the branches which struck him in the face. But then he stopped abruptly, fighting down the sense of panic.—“Steady now—” he said aloud.—There was no use to look for it. He had no notion of the spot where he had fallen, not the least sense of direction. He could not go ahead nor back nor anywhere at all. It was no use to

move, for he was helpless.—Wait now!—What was it Werner said?

—stop where you are and stay there till it's light enough to see.

Yes, those were the orders. They had thought of everything—of this perhaps.—But when it was light—if there was nothing to be seen?—He had asked that question and Werner could not answer it.—If when it was light you found yourself—*alone?*—Panic stirred again.—“Come now,” he said, “no nonsense!”

And when would it be light?—His eyes flew to his watch, but the crystal had been crushed against a stone, the hands were missing from the dial.—How long?—There was no way to tell.—Well, it didn't matter much.

He sat down on the ground with his arms locked round his knees, huddling from the cold, and then suddenly he thought that he heard voices. “Very pretty, Raeder. Very neatly done,” they seemed to say. But of course that was absurd. His heart began to pound with hope and terror. He could not make out the words but there were voices whispering. There was no mistake about it.

"Hello—" he called out softly. "Here is Raeder, second company.—Hello—" There was no answer. "Ach now," he groaned, "I am imagining things."—What folly to suppose that his comrades could be here in the bottom of this gully!—He had heard no whispering voices,—but the rustling of the leaves, the patter of the rain, doves or pigeons cooing— Wait now!—The whispering voices resolved into the murmur of a running brook close beside his feet—

"Very pretty, Raeder. Very neatly done." It was easy to imagine things at night and by yourself when there was no friendly voice to set you right.—"Very pretty, Raeder. Very neatly done." It was almost like a song.—Good thing the captain had not seen him tumbling down that bank. Perhaps he would not be a corporal any more,—no longer Corporal Cat but simply Private Raeder.—And then there were the things that he had lost:—his Luger and his knife, the tin hat and the torch, and finally the compass. He would have some trouble to explain all this, and perhaps he would be Private Raeder after all.—And what would Martha say to that?

But the hand grenades were safe, nestling snugly in the sack against his breast. And no doubt they would be pleased to receive them in the morning and might overlook those other matters. In any case he had done the best he could. Those Luftwaffe men had really been to blame,—careless, snooty fellows, not in the least concerned for any trouble that they caused.—Yes, he had done his best and it had not been much fun. But the worst of it was now, waiting here alone, not knowing where you were or what it would be like—

He was beginning to feel sleepy and he shook himself awake. It would not do to have the dawn creep on him unaware. He must keep thinking about something. . . .

3

“WHAT A LIFE!”

Dr. Hess grumbled to himself. “After fifty years one should be relieved of such things.” He sighed heavily, staring into the night over the rubber apron which was drawn to his chin against the drizzling rain. “Come, Gretchen—” he addressed his horse, a faithful confidant who had for many years pulled the old fashioned gig about the neighborhood. “Exert yourself a little, please.” He shook the reins impatiently but the old mare knew her master and did not mend her pace. It was so dark he could not see beyond her rump, shining wetly in the light of the oil lamps at the sides.

"Well, doubtless you know best—" He sighed again with weary resignation.

"What a life!—And what a night!" he added by way of variation. He was returning home from a confinement case which had been difficult and tedious,—a farmer's wife with her first child. The husband had not been there; he was in the army somewhere;—but the mother and a midwife, a stupid, clumsy creature who had been no help at all. He had almost lost the child through the lack of simple things at hand in any hospital. But in the end the brat had been delivered,—the squirming lump of flesh had squawked its way into the world.

"And kindly tell me why?" he said aloud. "What is the good of it?—Listen to me, Gretchen, and explain it if you can:—why should I, who have not been blessed or cursed with children of my own, be dragged out of my bed in the middle of the night to deliver little brats whose sole function in the world will be to carry guns and to destroy each other?—As you see, my friend, there is no sense in it. I am guilty of something, an accessory in fact to some kind of a crime—"

"Hello now, what is wrong?" He shook the reins and clucked his tongue. "Get on with you!" But Gretchen balked and backed. "Get on, I say! What the devil do you mean by such behavior?" He slapped the reins across her back but Gretchen would not move. "Ah well—" He undid the apron and climbed out into the rain, exploring with a pocket flash. His house was close at hand, scarcely a hundred meters farther on.

"Ach so!"—There was something in the road, stretching almost from side to side across it.—"What have we here, my friend?"—He approached it and took hold of it:—wet, muddy fabric,—something that had fallen from a wagon or a truck. But it was not there when he passed by, a little before midnight. And who could have been traveling on this lonely road since then?—Well really it was curious.—He untied one of the ropes which was wrapped around the bundle and spread the thing apart—

"A parachute!" He stared. There was no mistake about it; he had seen these things before. Someone had descended from the sky and landed in this spot, a stone's throw from his house, within

the last four hours,—an enemy no doubt. Well, who else could it be? And perhaps there were a hundred—or a thousand of these bundles scattered close around. He flashed his torch about but there were no other bundles to be seen.

“Amazing notion—” He pondered for some moments, startled but not frightened, and then he shrugged his shoulders. “I approve your caution, Gretchen, but this appears to be a military matter and there is nothing we can do about it.” He led the horse around the road’s edge, setting the frogs to croaking in the ditch, and climbed back into the gig. The village was some distance farther on beyond his home. Perhaps he ought to go and wake up somebody:—the village-mayor whom he did not like, or the Luft-Schutz man whose name he did not know, or that fellow in charge of the Gestapo to whom he never spoke if he could help it. They did not like him either and were never very cordial except when they were sick or their wives were having brats. They resented the fact that he kept himself aloof and was not always running to their meetings to organize some silly undertaking or denounce this thing or that. Stupid fellows, all of

them! And what could they do about it if they knew? Nothing to be sure except to hold a meeting and scare everyone to death.—And perhaps it wasn't anything,—or possibly a hoax.—Yes, a hoax seemed not unlikely. He seized on this idea with a feeling of relief though he did not truly think that it was probable.—At this point in his thought the mare turned off the road and through the gate.

“Yes, well—” He got out of the gig and leaned against her flank, drooping with fatigue, while he undid the buckles of the harness.—A wise decision certainly; such matters could be safely left to horse sense. Parachutes might fall out of the sky by the dozen or the thousand but unfortunate little brats would keep on being born.—He turned the mare loose in the yard and got his satchel from the gig.—Still, he wished he had not seen the thing at all. Why must they leave it in the middle of the road? It was very thoughtless of them.—He groped his way into the house, treading heavily on the stairs, half hoping that he would be heard.

“Gustav—” his wife's voice called sleepily from the bedroom.

“Yes, here,” he answered. He went into the

bathroom and turned on the light, regarding himself in the mirror which hung above the washstand. There was a stubble of beard upon his sallow face,—pouches underneath his eyes, relics of nephritis from that other war. His hair was white above the temples and getting thin on top. He was not much to look at, he thought fretfully,—already old at fifty and with his health impaired. He had once been rather proud of his appearance,—slender but with an intellectual air, a suggestion of the artist,—not undistinguished.

“What time is it?”

He looked at his watch. “Half-past-three,” he said, and began to take his clothes off.

“So late?” She sighed in an irritating way she had, as if he were to blame for something. “Was it all right?”

“Another child is born,” he answered glumly.

“Oh!—Is it still raining?”

“Yes.”

“Well—” He heard her smoothing out the bed-clothes, settling back into the pillow, and presently he came into the doorway in his nightshirt, looking into the dark room.

"Something funny—" he began and stopped. He had not meant to tell her until morning, yet knowing that he would, unable to resist a sadistic urge to frighten her.

"What?"

"Oh nothing!—It will keep."

"Gustav!—What?" He knew that she was wide awake now.

"Just something in the road—"

"In the road?—But what?"

"A parachute," he said with studied carelessness.

"A parachute?—What are you saying?" She snapped on the light and sat up in the bed,—a large, blond woman who had once been pretty, but fat and faded now.—Not much to look at either, he reflected, with those curlers in her mussed hair and her big breasts hanging loose against her cotton nightgown.—"Are you joking, Gustav?"

"No," he said and described what had occurred, watching with inner satisfaction her doll-like eyes grow wider with alarm.

"But what is to be done?"

"Done?—Why nothing." He sat down on the bed. "It is no affair of ours."

"No affair of ours!—Have you gone out of your head?"

"Not at all." He pretended to yawn, beginning to be sorry he had spoken. "I am not concerned with military matters."

"How absurd!—Perhaps you would like us to be murdered in our beds?"

"Oh come, that isn't likely! Why should they bother us?—And it may be a hoax," he added lamely.

"A hoax!—Who would play a trick like that?"

"I don't know, Clara." He yawned again. "The contemporary scene has many aspects of perverted humor."

"Oh really—" Her voice rose shrilly. "This is no time to be clever. You must go to the village and report the thing at once."

"Impossible, my dear." He stroked his chin to hide a smile. "I have turned Gretchen loose—"

"How stupid of you!"

"No doubt. But she has gone into the pasture."

"Then you must walk."

"Walk." He was not laughing now.

"Certainly. Why not? It's only a kilometer."

"But in this rain—"

"You can wear your rubber coat and overshoes."

"Clara, be reasonable. I have been up all night; I am exhausted. And what is to be gained?—What can those yokels do but talk and scare each other?"

"No matter, it's your duty."

"Duty!" He shrugged his shoulders with exasperation. "I am sick to death at mention of that word."

"Gustav, please—"

"No." He shook his head. "I am not such a fool. And also,—yes, remember, if I went—" He eyed her shrewdly. "—then you would be alone here in the house."

"Oh—" He saw her struggling between laziness and fright.

"There is no telling what might happen—"

"Yes, Gustav, I know—" Her voice was close to tears. "But I will stay. You can lock the door and take the key."

"Ridiculous!" he fumed, irritated at his failure. "I will do nothing of the kind. It is no affair of mine. In the morning some farmer will come by and—"

"And suppose that it were known?" There was something in her accent that made him look up quickly.

"Known?—What?"

"That you had found the parachute and had not told."

"What then?" he said uneasily.

"What would they think of such a thing?"

"What do I care what they think?"

"They do not like you too well as it is—"

"Is that my fault?"

"You put on airs with them—"

"Nothing of the kind." He was whipping up his anger.

"Well yes, you do, Gustav," she insisted plaintively, "and it's no use to deny it."

"Simply because I will not talk like a parrot and 'Heil Hitler' every loafer in the street—"

"Well anyway, they have been watching you—"

"Watching me?" He was genuinely startled.

"What do you mean by that?"

"No matter, it is true."

"But what?" He stared at her. "Come now, what are you driving at?"

"Something that I heard—" And she began to cry.

"Something?—when?—from whom?—Stop crying now and tell me."

"Frau Schmitt—" she sobbed.

"Frau Schmitt!" He could not place her for a moment. Oh yes, the butcher's wife. He had seen her in the shop sometimes,—a homely woman with a hatchet face. And once,—yes once, not long ago, he had complained to her about a piece of meat.

"Well then, what did she say?"

"Just that, Gustav."

"Just what?"

"That they were watching you."

"Bah!" He flung his hands out angrily.

"In confidence of course. She meant only to be friendly."

"What rubbish!" He got up and paced across the room.

"She said that now since Dr. Meyer was no longer here—"

"Yes?—Well?"

"And you were the only doctor in the town—"

"Go on."

"Well, she thought that it would be unfortunate if—"

"If what?"

"Oh Gustav—" she sobbed noisily. "Why must you be different from everybody else?"

"Why?" He turned his back, tapping with his fingers on the window pane. "A remnant, I suppose, of human dignity."

"Of course it isn't anything—" She sniffled, dried her eyes upon the bed sheet. "But I thought I ought to tell you."

"Yes—" He nodded wearily.

"And I only said—*suppose*—"

"Suppose?" He had forgotten where it started.

"Suppose it should be known you had found the parachute and had not told about it."

"Bah!" he said again. And suddenly the thought flashed through his mind that perhaps it was a trap, something they had put there in the road, knowing that he would pass by and find it,—a cunning scheme to test his loyalty. He was conscious of his quickened breath. It was really too ridiculous and yet—they were capable of doing things like that.

"Gustav, please—"

"What?" He stared at her for a long moment, biting his thin lip, turning the matter in his mind. "Oh well—" He shrugged ungraciously. "—if you would be more comfortable about it—"

"Thank you, Gustav." She said it plaintively and humbly but there was a hint of triumph in her eyes and he was not deceived. He knew her and himself. "I only want what's best for you." He nodded but he could not keep his lip from curling slightly for them both. "Really you must be a little careful—"

"Careful!" He came over to the bed. "I do not like the word,—as if I were a Jew or communist—"

"Oh no, I didn't mean—"

"One moment, please." He checked her with a gesture. "I assure you I am not a worm. If that displeases them—well, let them find somebody else to tend their wives and brats." And he went into the bathroom before she could reply and began to dress himself.

"Careful—" he kept saying to himself. "Yes, I must be careful—careful—" His clothes were damp and clammy; he would certainly catch cold from all this nonsense. She might have offered to get up

and make a cup of coffee. "Oh well—" He put on his rubber coat and overshoes and came back into the doorway. "I will take the key," he said.

"Yes, Gustav—" She had picked up a novel from the table by the bed. "I will read while you are gone."

"You will not be—afraid?"

"No—" she lied, smiling at him wanly. "But please come back as quickly as you can."

"Well, naturally—" he grumbled and went down the stairs and out into the yard. It was still drizzling steadily.

"Careful—careful—" he kept saying to himself. And she was right about it; that was the irritating thing. She was always right. Her gnat-like intelligence was faultlessly adapted to the world in which she lived,—a perfect National Socialist. If a thing was expedient, it was right. She had no moral scruples, was tossed on the horns of no dilemma,—a natural opportunist, like a boa constrictor or a tiger. If she had had more brains of the same quality she might have been a leader of the Party.

"Careful—careful—" He flashed his torch about, picking his way around the puddles in the road.—

No doubt he could have found the horse; she was probably close behind the barn. Well, no matter; if he was to be a martyr, he would make the thing complete.—He pulled his hat brim down against the rain which fogged his eye-glasses.—Too bad he did not have a telephone; it would have saved this nonsense. He had had one until Dr. Meyer went, and then he had decided to get along without it. If they needed a doctor—well, they could come and find him. It was quite a saving in expense and it kept the country people from getting free advice. Of course with Meyer there it had been different. . . .

Yes, different in more ways than one.—He sighed.—Meyer was a Jew but he had turned out to be a very pleasant fellow,—a young man fresh from college and the clinics of big cities. He had come from Hamburg, buying out the practice of an elderly man who had wanted to retire,—an enthusiastic youth with a stimulating mind,—the only person in the town that he had cared to talk to. He had been alarmed at first at the idea of competition, but matters had worked out very nicely. Dr. Meyer had been glad to take the work he did not

want, obstetrics and the like; and so they had divided their affairs. They had come to be good friends and had spent many evenings in agreeable conversation—Meyer was a bachelor—or sometimes playing chess,—a gentlemanly, intellectual game.—He sighed again.

It had happened very suddenly although he had known that it was imminent. The Gestapo man—not the one who was here now but an early predecessor—had stopped him on the street, remarking with a leer that his business would presently be better. And a few days after that Dr. Meyer had called one afternoon to say good-bye,—not whining in the least but exceedingly tight-lipped and almost formal. He had not said where he meant to go, or really anything. It was as if a wall had come between them.—Good heavens, that was seven years ago!—How time fled by—

“What a world!”—And how different his own life had been from what he had expected when he was a boy in college. He had been greatly interested in psychiatry. No doubt the morbid aspects of the subject had appealed to his peculiar type of mind, but however that might be psychiatry was

then an open field with the bare beginning of a new approach and of a modern therapy. He had been fascinated by the idea, had planned to go on to Vienna and make a life work of the thing.

And then that other war had come along and he had gone into surgery for which there was of course a pressing need. And they had rushed him through and turned him out into the trenches when he barely knew how to hold a knife. He had learned his surgery on the battle field, an excellent school but hard upon the patients.—A long forgotten memory stirred. . . .

A boy had been brought in to his first aid dressing station which was close behind the front and even under fire.—It was in the final days before Verdun, and back of his fatigue and the coming of nephritis was the keen edge of defeat.—Well, the boy had been brought in and dumped down on the table, an undistinguished looking youth but with such pleading eyes— His right arm had been shattered by a piece of shrapnel. It was a dirty wound: fragments of bone were sticking through the flesh. An experienced surgeon with the time to spare might have put the thing together but there was

nothing he could do except to cut it off, and he had said so—

“Ah no, Herr Doctor, please—”

“But there is nothing else to do, I tell you.” He had spoken sharply, weary of the words he had heard so many times.

“No, no, Herr Doctor. No—”

“Come now, I cannot mend your arm and I cannot send you back in this condition. Gangrene will set in and you will die.”

“Then let me die, Herr Doctor—”

“What?” And he had stared, for they did not often answer in that way. “An arm is no great matter. Why do you care so much?”

“I am to be—a dentist.”

“Ah so!” And he had smiled, nodding to the orderly to bring the ether cone. “Well now, my friend, you must be something else.”

“Herr Doctor, please—” The tears had welled into his pleading eyes but he did not speak again. There was blood upon his lips where he was biting through them. . . .

“Well now, my friend, you must be something else—” He spoke the words aloud,—such simple

words to say.—What had happened to that boy who was to be a dentist?—and what difference did it make? His own experience was identical. To be sure he had not lost an arm, but still he had been maimed, crippled and defeated. The fine dreams of his youth had died and been buried in the trenches.—“You must be something else:”—not a brilliant young man doing research in Vienna, not an eminent psychiatrist now in middle age, not anything at all:—a penny-chasing country doctor, prescribing harmless pills, delivering brats.—“Ah well—”

He had knocked around a while after the war, and then he had met and married Clara, for no reason beyond that he was lonely and that she was pretty. Compelled to earn a living he had looked about and finally bought a practice in this stupid little town not far from the frontier. And here he had settled down to live, or, more veritably stating it, to die. And here he had been for twenty years, friendless and alone. Clara had not wanted children at the start, afraid to risk her figure before it had succumbed to her greedy taste for sweets and indolence, and later on he had lost interest in the

idea. He had felt if she had children they would somehow be like her—

“Careful—careful—” So they were watching him. Confound their impudence! What the devil did they mean by that?—He was German to the core, pure blooded Aryan, whatever that might be. And he was not a communist or parliamentary democrat or anything at all. He was a country doctor, attending to the sick, minding his own business; he had no time for politics.

“Careful—” Careful of what?—Let them conquer the world if that was what they wanted,—and then see what they’d do with it. Things would go on just the same. Institutions were no better than the people who composed them; it was folly to imagine that they could be. In England or America it was probably no different except that they called things by other names. Whoever was on top was bound to be a thief. Greed and Fear were the masters of the world and until they had been vanquished or at least were recognized to be the source of action, the motivating force behind human undertakings,—well, until then it was all a waste of time.

“Careful, eh?” he said contemptuously.—Still, it was no use to pretend that he was not disturbed. Suppose he were to be accused of something, anything in fact, and told to go as Dr. Meyer had been.—Go where?—Into a concentration camp perhaps—He was conscious of a chill along his spine.—It was utterly ridiculous, and yet in a society of bigoted, intolerant fools,—well, anything could happen—

He passed by the graveyard and the church and came into the narrow, silent street with its granite cobblestones and shuttered shops.—Human beings were the problem,—the individual man and not the group. Something that had happened early in his life had made him see that clearly and he had never lost the sense of it. It had been the source no doubt of his interest in psychiatry:—a lecture course he had attended in his student days at Jena,—lectures on philosophy by a funny little man with a goatee, whose name he still remembered—Dr. Heinkel—Dr. Ludwig Heinkel—

Dr. Heinkel had presented some fascinating theories to explain phenomena of human conduct. He had started with a strange assumption. . . .

“Young gentlemen—” He heard again the eager, high-pitched voice, and saw the grotesque figure pacing restlessly across the rostrum. “Young gentlemen, kindly give me your attention. It is beginning to be recognized in authoritative quarters that the course of evolution does not follow a straight line but is frequently blocked and comes to a dead end, so that actually we do not live in an expanding world but in a world of living fossils. Man may be the one exception, and if so it seems likely that he owes his survival not to brute strength, not to fitness in the sense that it is commonly regarded, but to inherent qualities of sensitivity and weakness. Evidence accumulates to substantiate this idea, for it now appears that Man has not ascended from the apes, but along a different and independent line from an ancestor common to them both,—in brief, young gentlemen, a tree-shrew, a small, defenseless animal, half squirrel, half rat,—a timid and affectionate creature which made its home in trees. Man is himself an excellent argument in favor of this theory since he is by nature peaceful, affectionate, and—afraid.” He had paused to smile, noting with pleasure the effect upon his listeners.

“And now, young gentlemen, remember if you please that philosophical conclusions may be drawn from biology:—what is thought of as weakness may be strength; and what is known as strength may be the hand of death,—death to the soul, to its potentialities, the beginning of the fossil. It is possible indeed that the biblical suggestion to turn the other cheek contains unimagined implications,—that it does involve in fact the only avenue of safety.”

Yes, that was it exactly. The idea had been new and stimulating to his youthful fancy. Perhaps he would have run it down to some logical conclusion, some clear-cut pattern of intelligible living, but the war had put an end to that. In any case it had profoundly influenced his life though the ultimate effect remained confused. And Dr. Ludwig Heinkel, what had become of him?—an old man now of course, likely enough dead and gathered to his ancestors, the tree-shrews—

“Careful—careful—” He stopped before a door, made sure he was right, and knocked upon it with his torch.

Herr Doblemann, the village-mayor, was the

rich man of the town. He owned several farms and also operated a kind of banking office where he loaned small sums of money at extortionate rates, sold insurance, steamship tickets, real estate, anything in fact by which he could turn a penny; and above which he lived in crowded inconvenience with a numerous family. The door and windows of the office were screened with iron shutters, but there was another door opening on some stairs which gave access to the living quarters. It was on this door that Dr. Hess was knocking with his torch.

"Hello—" he called and beat harder on the door. At length a window was pushed up and a head projected from it. Dr. Hess stepped back and aimed his flashlight at the window, revealing a sleepy, moon-faced man with flabby jowls and small eyes like a pig's.

"What is wrong?—Who is it?"

"Dr. Hess."

"Dr. Hess?—Ah so! What is the matter, doctor?"

"Something I have discovered in the road—"

"Something in the road—" Herr Doblemann

repeated, croaking hoarsely like a frog. "But what have I to do with that?"

"Idiot!" Dr. Hess commented to himself and said aloud, "Something which may be of importance—"

"Of importance?—So?" There was a pause. It occurred to the doctor that the mayor might imagine he was drunk. "What is it you have found?"

"Excuse me—" Dr. Hess said firmly, "but I do not care to shout the matter in the street." His teeth were chattering slightly, partly from the rain drops which were trickling down his neck and partly from a sense of outraged dignity.

"Oh—" Another pause. "A moment, doctor, please—" The head withdrew; the window rattled down.

"Stupid fool—" the doctor muttered, crouching against the door to escape out of the rain. But some other part of him kept repeating like a chorus, "Careful—careful—"

The bolts were drawn and the door creaked open. The mayor had opened it in person. He stood there half awake, tucking his mussy night-

shirt into half buttoned pants which might have been designed to clothe an elephant.

"Come in—" he said, glancing sharply at his visitor as if to determine his sobriety. He opened a door which led into the office and switched on a naked light bulb in the ceiling. It was a small, bare room divided by a wooden counter behind which were a desk and several chairs and, in the darkest corner, a sort of wire cage inhabited in business hours by a consumptive clerk. "A disagreeable night—" He yawned, leaning heavily with his elbow on the counter. The fly of his pants remained unbuttoned.

"Very," Dr. Hess said grimly, adding to himself, "The swine has not the decency to ask me to sit down."

"But excuse me, doctor, you were saying—"

"Saying?" Dr. Hess was looking at the wall on which there were some ancient, fly-specked travel posters:—the Bernese Oberland, Dalmatia, and amusingly enough the Tower of London. He was thinking how he could most alarmingly impart his information.

“Something I believe you mentioned you had discovered in the road—”

“Oh! Oh yes!” He was certain he heard sounds and whispering on the staircase, other members of the family awakened and eavesdropping, hoping for some crumbs from the bread of local scandal. He wished that he could see their faces when they knew. “Something in the road—precisely—yes—” Well, let them wait a while as he had waited in the rain; let them stand on the stairs as he was standing now. He would take his time about it. “A matter which I felt should be brought to your attention.” The mayor nodded recognition of his own importance but made no effort to suppress a yawn. He was convinced by now that his visitor was not drunk.

“An amazing business really—” The doctor frowned and shook his head. “But perhaps I should begin at the beginning—” He began with the confinement case to which he had been summoned a little before midnight by a neighbor of the patient’s who had come to his house upon a bicycle. He described the confinement in considerable detail, watching with delight his listener fidget, and he

spoke at some length of the darkness and the rain to that point on the road where Gretchen balked. He had alighted then to explore things with his torch,—the very one he had now in his hand—

“Yes, yes—” urged the mayor, shifting his weight from one foot to the other. But the doctor refused to be hurried in the least.

“A pile of something,” he explained, “stretching almost across the narrow lane.” On close examination it had turned out to be fabric, coated with mud and soaked with rain, and tied up in the middle with a rope,—in appearance not unlike a bundle of soiled clothes—

“Soiled clothes?” the mayor frowned doubtfully.

“Well, yes—” The doctor seemed to turn the matter in his mind. “—or something of the sort.” He had untied the rope and spread the thing apart, and then—“Prepare yourself, Herr Doblemann—” He paused dramatically, watching those little porcine eyes, waiting for the moment when somnolence would vanish and fear would take its place. “Not a bundle of soiled clothes,—no, nothing of the kind. But in fact—a parachute.”

"A parachute?" The great man stared. "Excuse me please, you said—"

"A parachute, Herr Doblemann."

"A parachute! Impossible!—But perhaps you are mistaken."

"No, I am not mistaken."

"But what would a parachute be doing in the road?"

"As to that—" The doctor shrugged.

"A parachute—" He paced across the room, shuffling heavily in his socks, his little eyes wide open now, his shirt tail sticking out through the unbuttoned fly, his rumpled hair on end. He resembled some ridiculous creature in a zoo—

"A fossil—" Dr. Hess heard himself say softly.

"What's that?"

"I did not speak, Herr Doblemann."

"But what can be the meaning of this matter?"

"Meaning?" The doctor smiled and spread his hands. "I can conjecture that no better than yourself, but it does not seem unlikely that we have been—invaded."

"Invaded?" The pig-like eyes were frightened.

"By soldiers of the enemy."

"Ah God!" He leaned against the counter for support. "But this is the Fatherland—" he mumbled weakly.

"The sky is over it," the doctor said.

"But such things do not occur—"

"Quite so—" the doctor nodded. He was satisfied with the effect he had created:—he was revenged upon the mayor whom he had always hated, upon his wife, the parachute, the rain, the hour of the night, the child that had been born— So they were watching him! A nice idea indeed!—He picked up his hat which was lying on the counter. "As a person in authority I felt that you should be informed." He moved as if to go. "I will leave the matter in your hands, Herr Doblemann."

"Leave?—Leave the matter in my hands?" The mayor turned pale. "One moment, doctor, please —" He hurried to the door and placed his back against it. "A parachute,—well, that is not in my discretion—"

"No?" Dr. Hess felt startled and confused.

"On the contrary, in fact—"

"But you are the village-mayor."

"A civil office, doctor, not in any way concerned with military matters."

"Indeed?" the doctor gulped and then clutched at a straw, "You are also local leader of the 'Strength Through Joy' society."

"That is true," the mayor admitted, "but there is nothing in my business which pertains to parachutes."

"I am not acquainted with the duties of your office," Dr. Hess replied, and, suddenly aware that the tables had been turned, was conscious of the depth of his fatigue.

"Naturally." Herr Doblemann was gaining in assurance. "But you should not have come to me at all."

"To whom then?"

"To Herr Tinken probably—"

"Herr Tinken?"

"The Luft-Schutz of the village."

"I did not know—"

"Every village in the Reich has its Luft-Schutz, Dr. Hess. Any school boy is familiar—"

"Ah so!" The doctor choked. Such impudence, presuming to instruct him!—But another voice was

whispering softly in his ear. "Careful," it cautioned, "careful—"

"Or to Herr Hintze," Herr Doblemann went on, "who, as you know, is in charge of the Gestapo."

"Yes, I see," the doctor muttered. But the other voice was saying something else. "Who, as you know—" it kept repeating. Had there been some covert emphasis in that? "—who, as you know—" What the devil did it mean?—He raised his eyes, struggling with the loathing and repugnance which engulfed him, overwhelmed again by the sense of his frustration. "I regret I have disturbed you—"

"Oh no, not in the least," the mayor assured him hastily.

"Please—" Dr. Hess held up his hand, instinctively aware of an advantage. "You have made your position clear:—your duty does not comprehend obligation in this matter."

"No, no." Herr Doblemann was breathing like a fish. "You misunderstand me, doctor. I have merely pointed out certain constituted channels of procedure. I am prepared of course to cooperate

in full, as the mayor of this village, as a patriotic German—”

“In that case—” The doctor chose his words with care and uttered them as dryly as he could. “In that case, Herr Doblemann, permit me to suggest that we are wasting time in quibbling over words,—wasting time which may be of importance.”

“Importance!—Yes—” Herr Doblemann was now in full retreat and beads of sweat appeared upon his forehead. “I have only wished to proceed in proper order. I assure you that is true.” He raised his voice and called, “Heinrich, come here!” An adolescent boy rushed into the room from where he had been listening on the stairs.

“Here, papa.”

“Good! Run at once to Herr Tinken—do not bother for your shoes—to Herr Tinken’s house, you understand?—Tell him that something of importance has occurred and ask him to come immediately.”

“Yes, papa.” And the boy rushed from the room.

“So—” The mayor drew in his breath and wiped

the sweat out of his eyes. "Excuse me, doctor, please, but I ask you to observe I am acting with dispatch,—that no time is being wasted—" And not pausing for an answer he ran behind the counter and began to turn the crank of an antique telephone which hung upon the wall. "Hello—hello—Herr Doblemann is speaking. Herr Hintze's house at once; it is important."

While he waited he continued to the doctor, "It would have been much better had you gone there directly. I feel sure you appreciate the fact. But I beg you to note that I am cooperating."

"Decidedly, Herr Doblemann." The doctor smiled and added with a patronizing air, "I shall not fail to mention it." And to himself he said, "This fat fool is shaking like a leaf; notwithstanding his position in this wretched little hole he has no more security than I have."

"Hello—hello—Herr Hintze?" His voice was thick with deference. "I regret to disturb you at this hour of the night, but something of importance has occurred.—Yes, something of importance, I assure you.—A parachute, Herr Hintze, has been found upon the road.—Yes, a parachute, I said. It

would seem that there was no mistake about it.—
By Dr. Hess, Herr Hintze,—Dr. Gustav Hess—”

“Hess,” the doctor said beneath his breath. The way the yokel spoke he made it sound like ‘Haas.’

“Yes, Herr Hintze, that is the case exactly.—
Dr. Hess is here now in my office.—Yes, I understand, Herr Hintze.—Yes, Herr Hintze, thank you.” He hung up the receiver and wiped his sweating face upon his nightshirt. “Herr Hintze will be here in five minutes—” He started nervously. “God in heaven, I must quickly dress myself!” And he shuffled toward the door.

“Thank you, Herr Doblemann.” Dr. Hess bowed carelessly. “You have been most helpful in this matter, and now—” He could not quite repress a note of triumph. “—and now, with your permission, I will go.”

“Go?” The mayor stared at him.

“Yes, home, Herr Doblemann—” A horrible foreboding crept into his thought. “I have been up all night, as I believe I mentioned, attending a confinement case. I am really quite exhausted—”

“But perhaps you did not understand?”

“Understand?” Again he was conscious of un-

utterable fatigue, a monstrous weight which bore him down, like a rider on his back, until his knees were bending from the pressure.

"Herr Hintze is coming to interrogate you, doctor."

"Ah God—" he groaned. "To interrogate me?—why?—There is nothing I can add—"

"But Herr Hintze has requested you remain."

"To the devil with Herr Hintze," he said beneath his breath, and then aloud with sudden inspiration, "But my wife is alone,—quite alone there in the house."

"Ah so?" Herr Doblemann looked mildly sympathetic.

"She begged me not to leave her," Dr. Hess lied glibly, hardly knowing what he said. "She has not been very well,—her condition is disturbed, her nerves are overwrought. Imagine her distress in such a situation—"

"Yes, yes—" Herr Doblemann made clucking sounds to testify to his compassion, but he was impatient of the matter.

"Surely—" the doctor urged, "you can explain the circumstances and render my apologies—"

“Why yes, Dr. Hess, I can do that—” Herr Doblemann was moving toward the door. “You must do as you see fit and I cannot advise you, but—” He paused in the doorway to look back. “—but permit me to remind you that Herr Hintze has requested you remain.” And he vanished and went heavily up the stairs.

“Ah God—” the doctor groaned again, and he stamped to the door which led into the street and put his hand upon the knob.—“Careful—careful—” the voice said in his ear. “Permit me to remind you—” He came back into the room, took off his rubber coat and flung it on the counter. He could hear hurried footsteps and voices overhead, and presently he thought that he smelled coffee. Frau Doblemann was up and providing for her master—

“The unconscionable pig! He did not even ask me to sit down,—did not offer me a chair.” He stamped behind the counter and sat down near the desk. The room was cold and damp, and little icy fingers were playing on his spine. “I shall be ill,” he said, as if he were determined on it. “I shall certainly be ill.” The aroma of coffee was unmistakable. He sniffed with growing fury and he

thought:—I could step there to the stairs and shout, “Herr Doblemann, excuse me please, but kindly have your wife bring me a cup of coffee.” Herr Hintze would behave in such a fashion,—one great man to another. But his sense of injury did not move him from his chair; his anger had no edge; it was impotent, lethargic, rusted dull with cankering frustration.

“What a world!”—Herr Hintze and Herr Doblemann,—great men in a frog pond, but replicas in fact of great men everywhere. Great men of affairs, conquerors and the like, were invariably stupid, for if they had vision they would laugh at what they did, and if they laughed they could not do it.

No, these great men of affairs were not really great at all. They did not make events; they rode on them, as a native on a surf board rides a wave crest. Without the wave he would not move a step. It was true he must be skillful, alert and shrewd, prepared to take advantage of his chance, qualities in brief which distinguished a good pick-pocket, but he did not make the wave, and the speed and extent of his success were due to forces

far outside himself. The so-called leaders of the world, those who found their way into the history books and whose uninspiring faces were displayed on monuments, had exerted their talents to keep abreast of the procession, and were usually run over in the end,—crushed beneath the wheels of the very Juggernaut whose course they were supposed to be directing—

Not great, but small,—desperately in earnest,—without a sense of humor which would neutralize their efforts,—myopic in their vision, for nothing was so simple as they made it out to be, nothing was confined to one dimension,—brutal and ruthless, for once astride a wave crest you were no longer free but inexorably bound to the action of the tide,—without pleasant conversation, without courtesy or charm,—devoid of the amenities which rendered life supportable—

“Yes, exactly—” He nodded his agreement to this engaging theory whose effect was to make him feel less wretched. Great men could be measured by this tapeline. To while away the time he drew upon his academic memories:—he began with Alexander and had come down to Hannibal when he

was interrupted by the entrance of Herr Tinken who came breathless through the door with young Heinrich at his heels.

“Ah, Dr. Hess—” Herr Tinken bowed. He was a small, indecisive man, nervously impressed by the importance of his summons. Herr Doblemann had appointed him Luft-Schutz of the village as one might throw a bone to an old dog. He had had no occasion to exercise his office and was quite unfamiliar with its functions. “A most disturbing matter, doctor—” He paused outside the counter and looked about as if in doubt what to do with his umbrella.

“Very—” Dr. Hess said dryly without rising from his chair. At least he would keep this fellow in his place. Luft-Schutz, eh?—Guardian of the Air?—a decrepit looking Mercury.—It was simply too ridiculous—

There was now a great racket in the street:—Herr Hintze was arriving in his motor car, not a very good one to be sure, but the only one of which the village boasted. Not even Herr Doblemann could equal such magnificence. Herr Hintze used the car—an official one of course—to drive

about the country on Gestapo business matters of one sort or another.

But why the devil need he bring it here?—The doctor was conscious of unreasonable resentment.—The fellow lived not a dozen houses distant, in a room above a shop where he kept bachelor quarters, where he had lived since he came, several months ago, from nobody knew where.—What the devil did he mean by making such a fuss?—No doubt a child-like gesture, designed to testify to his importance, but the practical result would be to rouse the town, with that chugging, rattling engine in the street—

Herr Doblemann plunged down the stairs in time to greet his visitor at the door. “Herr Hintze, if you please—” He backed into the room, rubbing his fat hands. He had dressed himself completely and his pants were fully buttoned; he had even combed his hair. “Kindly step this way, Herr Hintze—” He waved his arm. “Herr Tinken—Dr. Hess—”

“Herr Tinken—” Herr Hintze nodded brusquely. He was a young man, not more than thirty,—the only young man in the village except for two

or three who were unfit for military service. And he was not prepossessing in appearance:—his face was angular with thin tight lips, and his eyes protruded slightly, giving the impression of an impassive stare; his bearing was rigid and his manner was detached, as if he might be occupied with something else entirely. He wore the black Gestapo coat with the swastika emblem on its sleeve, and a military cap which he did not take off. “Herr Doctor—” He clicked his heels and bowed across the counter.

Dr. Hess rose from his chair.—Herr Doctor, eh? —So the fellow was proposing to be formal.—He would have liked to say, “Herr Lieutenant Hintze —” or something of the sort, but he did not know what title he should use, so he bowed from the waist as formally as he could and refrained from saying anything.

“Please be seated, Herr Hintze—” Herr Doble-mann, around whom seemed to cling a smell of coffee, was grimacing and scraping like a courtier. “The chair behind the desk is more comfortable, I think—” He turned his head to speak over his

shoulder. "Herr Tinken, if you please, do not keep Herr Hintze waiting—"

Dr. Hess sat down again and Herr Hintze took his place in the comfortable chair with a cushion on its seat,—the chair reserved for greatness. Herr Tinken followed, still carrying his umbrella which was dripping on the floor. He could not make up his mind what he should do with it.

"Herr Doctor—" Herr Hintze leaned back in his chair. "—I am ready now to hear anything you have to say." And he took out of his pocket a notebook and a pencil.

"Why really—" The doctor smiled, spreading his thin, white hands.—What absurd pretension! Like a Court of Inquiry. "—there is nothing I can add to what you already know. I was returning home from a confinement case when I found the parachute lying in the road."

"A parachute?—you are quite sure?"

"Quite."

"And just where did you find it?"

"In the middle of the road, a kilometer from here,—perhaps a hundred meters farther on beyond

my house. My horse refused to pass or I might not have noticed it."

"At what time did this circumstance occur?"

"Time?" The doctor shrugged, vaguely conscious of some pitfall in advance. "Perhaps an hour ago—"

"An hour—yes—" Herr Hintze wrote it down. "And then?"

"Why then—" He hesitated slightly and then hurried on too briskly, "I notified Herr Doble-mann who seemed to me the person to receive the information."

"Herr Doblemann." Herr Hintze nodded slowly. "You were driving, I believe?"

"Yes, driving—" He felt a little tightening of his breath. What was the intent of all these questions?

"And you drove directly on?"

"Yes—no, not directly—"

"Ah so?" Herr Hintze poised his pencil.

"I stopped a moment at my house—" He was suddenly on the defensive. "Well naturally,—my wife was there alone—"

"Naturally," Herr Hintze murmured dryly.

"I felt, you see, that she should be informed—"

"I see.—And then you drove on here?"

"Yes—well, no, I mean—that is to say—" His hands were moist with sweat and he rubbed his open palms upon his knees. "Excuse me, Herr Hintze, but it seems I have not made the matter clear. I did not drive from my house to the village, as you have assumed. No, that is not the case; on the contrary I walked."

"Walked?" Herr Hintze looked up sharply. "But why did you do that?"

"Why?" Dr. Hess laughed foolishly. The fatigue of his body had crept into his brain; he could no longer think. Herr Hintze was speaking but he hardly heard his words above the warning voice that was whispering in his ear.

"It is not a night to stroll," Herr Hintze seemed to say, "and your errand was important.—Why did you walk, Herr Doctor?"

"Why?—I believe you asked me why?" He laughed again so raspingly that Herr Tinken looked away. "It is really very simple:—I had unhitched the horse—I could not find her in the dark—"

"But why did you unhitch the horse?"

“Why did I unhitch her?” He stared at Herr Hintze with a strange look of defiance in his tired, bloodshot eyes, and then suddenly he stumbled to his feet. “Really, Herr Hintze, is this an inquisition?—Then of what am I accused?” He came close to the desk and struck it with his fist. “Why did I unhitch my horse? What affair is that of yours?” He was shaking now as if with an epileptic seizure and words poured from his mouth in an incoherent torrent. “A doctor—a physician—I ask you to take note.—Such indignity—impertinence!—A reputable person—a professional man in fact—resident for twenty years—”

“Careful, you fool,” the voice was screaming in his ear.

He stopped; the spark of fire had burned out. Herr Hintze’s face emerged out of a fog; he was leaning with his elbows on the desk, staring coldly with those bulging, fish-like eyes. Herr Doble-mann seemed stupefied; his mouth sagged open and little clucking sounds were coming from it. Herr Tinken was gazing at the puddle on the floor which had dripped from the end of his umbrella.

“Careful—careful—”

“Ah yes—” he made answer to himself, and backed a step away with his hand pressed to his head as if to still the torment in his brain. His shoulders drooped again; his arms hung loose, the fingers of his hands convulsively clenching and unclenching. There was no vestige left of what had been there. “Excuse me please, Herr Hintze—” He spoke almost inaudibly, mumbling his words, “I am not quite myself—I have been up all night—a confinement case with complications—the fatigue and the excitement—I trust that you will overlook—” He paused and leaned his weight upon a chair back; his knees were trembling and he thought that he might fall. But Herr Hintze sat there waiting—

“The question of my horse—the reason I unhitched her—which I could not recall at the moment that you asked.—A very natural question; I appreciate that fact.—Well, I remember now,—yes, the reason has come back—” He paused again, thinking very carefully of the words that he would say. “I had thought, Herr Hintze,—it had occurred to me that the parachute might be perhaps—a hoax.”

"A hoax, Herr Doctor?"

"Why, yes, Herr Hintze,—yes, exactly.—Someone having a joke—intending to alarm me or—or anyone who happened to pass by—"

"Ah so?"

"Yes, Herr Hintze, I assure you.—But then I decided that, regardless of the fact, it was my duty to report the situation. Unfortunately of course the horse had been unhitched and I was compelled to walk.—I hope, Herr Hintze, I have made the matter clear."

Herr Hintze was writing in his book and he did not deign to answer, nor was there in his face the slightest clue to what might be passing in his thought. At length he raised his head.

"The parachute, Herr Doctor?"

"The parachute, Herr Hintze?"

"You left it where you found it?"

"Ah yes, just as I found it, in the middle of the road."

"So—" He made a final entry in the book, returned it to his pocket and stood up. Herr Tinken also rose, clutching his umbrella.

"Excuse me, Herr Hintze—" he queried nerv-

ously, "but perhaps I should report by telephone to Herr Lieutenant Richter who is Luft-Schutz of the District?"

"Presently, Herr Tinken. It is necessary first to verify the matter."

"Yes certainly, to verify—" Herr Doblemann nodded his approval, as one who finds opportunity to speak after a long delay.

"There is nothing more, Herr Hintze?" Dr. Hess had not been listening.

"A moment please, Herr Doctor. You will accompany us."

"Accompany you?"

"To the place where you found the parachute."

"Oh—" He nodded dully with a sinking heart.

"It will save you a walk," Herr Doblemann said grimly.

"Yes, a walk—" the doctor murmured. "Yes, thank you very much—" What the devil did the fellow mean by that?—He pulled on his rubber coat and found his hat.—Ah God, would there never be an end to it?—was he bound to these fossils forever and forever?

It was still drizzling steadily when they emerged

into the street. Herr Hintze's rattletrap had served the purpose of a tocsin:—there were lights in several windows and Herr Schmitt, the butcher, was standing in the doorway of his shop across from the Doblemann establishment. Herr Schmitt was Leader of the Home Guard, a group of twenty middle-aged but earnest patriots which included nearly all of the able-bodied men remaining in the village. Pastor Niemen was not one of them, and Dr. Hess, when invited to join, had excused himself on the ground that his practice did not afford him time to be present at their drills.

These drills occurred at stated intervals under the watchful eye of blacksmith Kolb who had been a drillmaster in that other war and was competent and brisk about his business. The Home Guard had no uniforms and only motley weapons; it functioned mainly as a Veterans' Club whose headquarters were established in Herr Wetzler's beer saloon. There on Sunday afternoons the Home Guard held its meetings in the long, low-ceilinged room with Herr Doblemann presiding as commander *ex officio*. The members consumed enormous steins of beer, discussed such public matters as came to their

attention, and usually concluded by singing favorite songs.

On holidays, or when by proclamation there was something to be celebrated, they dressed themselves with special care and paraded in the street with Herr Doblemann leading the procession. On these occasions they were supremely happy;—they marched and counter-marched, presented arms, and so forth, while the blacksmith strutted here and there barking orders at them. They had never had anything to guard except their own stupidity:—it had never seemed likely that they would have.

When Herr Doblemann came out Herr Schmitt ran eagerly across the street and stopped at a respectful distance from the group. He was startled to observe that Dr. Hess was with them and the thought flashed through his mind that the doctor had been caught in some treasonable affair and was now under arrest. He was not surprised since the doctor's attitude had been for some time past an object of suspicion and indeed had been discussed in Home Guard circles.

"Yes, Herr Schmitt?" Herr Doblemann said briskly.

"Excuse me, Herr Doblemann, I do not wish to intrude—"

"Yes, well—" Herr Doblemann looked doubtfully at Herr Hintze who promptly took the matter from his hands.

"We can make no statement at the moment."

"No statement at the moment," Herr Doblemann said firmly.

"But if you permit me to advise—" Herr Hintze hesitated.

"By all means, Herr Hintze, please—"

"I should give orders to assemble the Home Guard as rapidly as possible—with arms and ammunition."

"Yes, certainly—" Herr Doblemann addressed the butcher sternly. "Home Guard to be assembled—with arms and ammunition. Immediately, Herr Schmitt."

"Immediately, Herr Doblemann." The butcher clicked his heels.

"At Wetzler's Bierhaus—" Herr Hintze prompted.

"At Wetzler's," Herr Doblemann commanded.

"Wetzler's," echoed Schmitt.

"To wait there for further orders—"

"To wait for further orders."

"Very good, Herr Dobleman."

"Heil Hitler!"

"Heil Hitler!" The butcher pivoted in military fashion and vanished in the night.

Dr. Hess was not attending. He had got into the back seat of the car beside Herr Tinken where Herr Hintze had curtly motioned him to go,—not the place of honor which would be next to the driver and which was of course reserved, but an ignominious one, in the rear of the car, like a prisoner in van. He had heard what had been said but as if it were remote, in some other time and place, not pertaining to this matter in which he was involved.—Home Guard to be assembled—with arms and ammunition.—Some childish undertaking of adolescent men.—The car began to chug and then to move, rattling like a jail door on the slippery cobblestones, its sickly yellow headlights blunted by the murk.

"What a world!"—And what exactly had he said, standing beside the desk, shaking like a leaf?—"Really, Herr Hintze, is this an inquisition?—Then

of what am I accused?"—Yes, something of that kind and it was bad enough, but how much more?—what else?—He took off his glasses which were opaque with raindrops. The car was covered with a canvas top which leaked, and rain blew in through the uncurtained sides. It limped out of the village onto the open road, slithering in the mud from side to side. The engine coughed and sputtered,—a decrepit vehicle unsuited to great men but appropriate enough for ineffectual creatures like Herr Tinken and himself—

"What a world!"—And what else had he said?—what—what?—He could not remember anything except Herr Hintze's face emerging from a fog, and those clucking sounds Herr Doblemann was making. Something had seemed to snap inside his brain; and no wonder he had gone a little mad, considering the abuses to which he had been subjected. He had done what he could to make amends, had apologized in full; he remembered every word he had said then. But Herr Hintze had not answered.

What the devil had he written in that book?—Well, no matter what it was. Whatever he had

said in the frenzy of emotion was no more than the truth. Let it be a lesson to them not to tramp on human dignity, not to drive a man too far. He had given them fair warning; he had— Ah God, what good was it pretending things like that? As well to warn a bull who was goring you to death, or the surf in which you drowned. He was afraid—*afraid*— Any other comment was the flimsiest evasion.

He was watching a light on the left side of the road, coming and going through the foliage of the trees, and then suddenly he knew they were coming to his house,—that the light was in the bedroom, just where he had left it an eternity ago. And Clara was in bed, stretched out at her ease with her nose deep in a novel,—some silly piece of trash, romantic and unreal, written by a fossil to be read by living fossils. She would hear the car approaching and would look out of the window, or she might not even trouble to do that.

“Excuse me, Dr. Hess—” Herr Tinken spoke respectfully from the darkness at his side, “—are you still of the opinion that it might be—a joke?”

“A joke?”

“I mean, the parachute—”

"It is all a joke," he answered bitterly. And then he caught his breath. Had Herr Hintze heard and noted his remark?—"Really, Herr Tinken," he said roughly, almost angrily, "I know no more about it than anybody else."

"Ah so!" Herr Doblemann exclaimed, peering through the dripping windshield. The car came to a stop, skidding sideways in the mud, and they got out, Herr Tinken holding fast to his umbrella which he did not raise. The parachute was lying in the road,—like a pile of dirty laundry, just as he had left it. Herr Hintze spread it out beneath the headlights.

"Yes, a parachute—" he said, and then he walked about, exploring with a flashlight, looking in the road and at the sides. The mayor and the Luft-Schutz stood gaping at the thing, not venturing to touch it, regarding it as if it were—

"Some celestial object," the doctor muttered to himself, "suddenly descended from interstellar space."

"Observe, Herr Tinken—" the mayor said solemnly, "—a parachute in fact."

"Yes, a parachute, Herr Doblemann—" Herr

Tinken clutched his umbrella to his breast. "Yes, in fact a parachute—"

Dr. Hess turned away and leaned wearily against a fender. His interest was detached, as if he viewed the scene through the wrong end of a telescope.—Now that the fools had seen it, what would they do about it?—And no doubt it was a hoax. Well, what else could it be?—What would enemies be doing in this God forsaken spot?—remote from a highway, from an urban population and industrial operations,—without military value or strategic consequence.

Yes, of course it was a hoax, and the fact would be established when no other parachutes and no soldiers could be found. It would soon be light and then— Gazing toward the horizon he thought he could detect the first evidence of dawn:—it seemed to be less dark, and the trees along the road, which had been quite invisible, were beginning to take form, looming blackly against a lighter sky. But all of these reflections were completely overshadowed by a much more pressing question in his mind:—What had that fellow written in his book?

"Herr Doblemann!" Herr Hintze called out sharply.

"Yes, Herr Hintze?"

"Look there!" He was pointing with his flashlight at the fence across the ditch. "The wires have been cut."

"Yes, so I see, Herr Hintze—"

"They have gone in that direction."

"Naturally, Herr Hintze."

"Excuse me, Herr Hintze—" Herr Tinken ventured timidly, "but that is toward the Mountain."

"Well?"

"I merely call attention—" the Luft-Schutz stammered faintly, "—there is nothing there, Herr Hintze,—rocky, grazing ground,—quite useless, I believe."

"However that may be they have gone in that direction."

"Yes, certainly," Herr Doblemann said reprovingly. "Do not waste our time, Herr Tinken."

"Yes, Herr Doblemann. I merely wished—" The Luft-Schutz subsided in silence.

Dr. Hess was mildly startled. The empty panel in the fence detracted from the theory of a hoax.

And yet what did it prove?—There was nothing over there, as Herr Tinken pointed out: the beginning of the Mountain, a rugged rock escarpment rearing up uniquely from the gently rolling hills, pitted with deep, impassable ravines,—an impossible terrain for military undertakings.—He had often hunted rabbits on the steep, brush covered slopes.

“There are doubtless many more.” Herr Hintze came back briskly toward the car.

“Many more, Herr Hintze?”

“Parachutes, Herr Doblemann,—a regiment perhaps, scattered in the fields.”

“Ah so?” The mayor sucked in his breath. “Yes, certainly, of course. Then perhaps we should go back—”

“Yes, back, Herr Doblemann.” He put his foot upon the step.

“And this one—” Herr Tinken presumed to intervene, pointing at the parachute with the end of his umbrella. “What shall we do with it, Herr Hintze, please?”

“Do with it?” Herr Hintze hesitated.

“What nonsense!” the doctor commented to himself. The great man was confused. He had suc-

ceeded finally in frightening himself,—seeing all around him piles of parachutes, and enemies with guns hiding in the fields, perhaps behind the trees which lined the road, waiting for the moment,—for the order to attack. As for Herr Doblemann, he was glaring at Herr Tinken and breathing like a porpoise,—unquestionably shaking in his shoes. It was amusing—

At this moment there was a dull explosion,—far off to the right in the direction of the Mountain. It was plainly not a gunshot; it was much too deep for that. Indeed the earth had trembled and the sound had rolled like thunder. But it was not thunder either; it was something made by man.

“Ach God—” Herr Doblemann dove into the car close behind Herr Hintze. The starter whirred; the motor coughed and chugged. Herr Tinken hastily climbed into the back.

“Dr. Hess—” he called.

“Oh yes—” the doctor hesitated with his foot upon the step. “But if there is nothing more—”

“Nothing more?” Herr Hintze said impatiently, twitching at the wheel.

"I mean, my house is close at hand,—just there behind the trees, and so I will not trouble you—"

"As you choose, Herr Doctor." He leaned across Herr Doblemann to emphasize his words. "But there is something more."

"Please, Herr Hintze?"

"Perhaps you are ready to concede that the parachute was not a joke?"

"Yes, certainly, Herr Hintze—"

"Then I need not remind you that your services are likely to be needed."

"My services, Herr Hintze?"

"As a surgeon, Herr Doctor."

"A surgeon?—please?"

"You have a professional duty, if no other, I believe." Herr Hintze spoke these words with coldly pointed meaning.

"Oh!—Oh yes—" The doctor's knees were trembling and his heart began to thump. He barely comprehended what the fellow was now saying.

"The Home Guard will deploy along this road to defend the Fatherland against its enemies until the army comes to our relief. We shall return im-

mediately, so kindly be prepared with your surgical equipment. You understand, Herr Doctor?"

"Why yes, Herr Hintze—yes—" He stepped back from the car, which had begun to move.

"A professional duty," he repeated to himself, "if no other, I believe."—If no other—*if no other*—What had he meant by that?—The car backed around and rattled by, splashing him with mud. He saw the mayor's fat face, framed for an instant by his flashlight:—it was white, like the face of a man who had been drowned.—Well, that fool was frightened too,—but as a member of a group,—not alone, all by himself; and that was different. And not frightened by something which he could not attack, whose wounds could not be probed by any surgeon,—not something elusive and intangible, against which there was no defense except eternally vigilant deceit—hypocrisy—the surrender of one's soul,—a kind of living death.

"Ah God—" He trudged on through the rain. The day was coming now; he could faintly discern the edges of the road without his flash.—If no other—*if no other*—What had he meant by that?—and what had he written in that notebook?—He turned

through the gate across the weed-grown yard, unlocked the door and went into the house.

"Gustav—" Clara's voice called tremulously from the bedroom.

"Yes, here—" He opened the door into his office and switched on the light upon the desk. The wall-paper was ugly and the furnishings were shabby,—not the kind of a setting he had fancied for himself—

"What time is it?"

"Almost five." He kicked off his overshoes and removed his dripping coat.

"Where have you been so long?"

"With Herr Hintze and Herr Doblemann—" He struck a match and lit the sterilizer.

"Herr Hintze?—Oh!" There was a pause. He collected several instruments and dropped them in the pan. "Was Herr Hintze—pleasant, Gustav?"

"Naturally. Why not?" he called back irritably. He would not,—could not talk about it now,—nor at any other time. If he had acted like a fool,—well, that was his affair.

"A car went by—"

"Yes, Herr Hintze brought me home." That would throw her off the scent.

"Oh, did he really, Gustav?" A pause. He collected some packages of gauze and put them in his satchel. "That was very kind of him."

"Yes—" he answered carelessly.

"And the parachute, Gustav?"

"It is lying in the road. They wished to verify,—that is, to see it."

"Oh!—But what does it all mean?"

"I don't know, Clara." He turned up the flame beneath the sterilizer.

"What does Herr Hintze think?"

"Well, he is undecided—" If no other—*if no other—*

"Oh!—A little while ago there was a sound like an explosion."

"Really?" He got a phial of ether and put it in the satchel.

"But you must have heard it, Gustav."

"Some farmer shooting rabbits—"

"It did not sound like that."

"No?" He was checking his equipment in his mind.

“What are you doing?”

“Nothing—”

“Why don’t you come upstairs?”

“I am going to make myself a cup of coffee.”

“Oh—” A pause. He could see her struggling, —consumed with curiosity but too lazy to get out of the bed. “Well, it was good you went; you must admit that, Gustav.”

“Yes, good—” He yawned.—Possibly the fatal excursion of his life.—He went out of the room and down the hall which led from the front door to the kitchen.

“It is nice that you are friendly with Herr Hintze.”

“Well, why not?” He yawned again and closed the door; he could not hear her now, thank God.

He lighted the oil stove and put some water on to boil. They had sometimes had a maid but had let the last one go as a matter of economy.—It was just as well, he thought,—you could never tell what servants might repeat. If one was being watched, it was best to be alone—

He stood at the window with his forehead pressed against the glass which felt agreeably cold.

—He had probably a temperature and would certainly be ill.—Yes, it was lighter now. He could discern the outline of the barn, a huge old stone affair with narrow slit like windows. The place had formerly been a farm and the barn was better built and more pretentious than the house which was slowly but surely falling into ruin. He had not bought the farm,—just the house and the barn and the meadow at the back. He had thought some day to have the house pulled down and to convert the barn into a dwelling place. Something artistic might have been developed. But Clara had not been intrigued with the idea. From her point of view a barn remained a barn—

Well, it didn't matter now. He was no longer interested—had long since gotten over things like that.—He turned back to the stove. The water was about to boil and he crossed to the cupboard and took down the coffee jar.—If no other—*if no other*—Herr Hintze had meant *something*—

He was measuring out the coffee when a second explosion shook the house. It was louder and much closer than the first.

“Ah God—” He put the coffee in the pot and

sank down on a chair. He could not stand up another moment.—Someone was doing something over there—in the direction of the Mountain. And it was not a farmer shooting rabbits—and it was not a hoax. And the Home Guard would deploy along the road, with the butcher and the blacksmith proudly leading the advance,—and people would be hurt—or possibly be killed—

To the devil with such matters!—If no other—*if no other*— But perhaps he was straining at a gnat. After all what had he done?—of what could he be accused?—He was innocent of any dereliction, had never been guilty of a treasonable act. But neither had poor Meyer.—No, that was not the point,—not the point at all. If you were not one of them in your heart and in your soul,—if you did not conform, in the essence of your being, to the pattern they established—

“Gustav! — Gustav!” Her voice penetrated through the door and he got up and opened it.

“Yes?—What?”

“The explosion!—But you heard it!”

“Well? What then?”

“What does it mean?”

"I don't know."

"But I am frightened, Gustav."

"You are in good company."

"What?"

"Nothing. Go back to sleep."

"But I am much too frightened."

"Well then, get up."

"Oh, Gustav—" And she began to cry.

But she would not get up, he knew,—not until explosions were occurring in the house. He started to go back into the kitchen when he heard a dog barking in the direction of the road, and he went along the hall to the front door to look into the yard. He could see across the road into the neighboring field,—that field in whose fence the wires had been cut. But the air was so thick with rain and mist that he could barely see beyond the fence. The dog was somewhere in the field and coming closer. And then he saw a figure emerging from the haze,—a small figure running swiftly toward the road—the figure of a child,—and yes, there was a dog running at his heels and barking wildly.

The child was at the fence now, crawling through the wires. He thought that it was crying,

though he could not hear its voice. It was holding one hand against its head and there seemed to be a black smudge on its face.—A shepherd boy from the region of the Mountain,—barelegged, with a ragged scrap of oil-cloth pinned around his shoulders. The dog was a sheep dog; he could see it plainly now. The child came on across the road directly toward the house. The smudge on his face looked as though it might be blood. . . .

4

NO, STEPHAN THOUGHT, it would not do to fall asleep, to have the dawn creep on him unaware,—to be seen before he saw. In the dark it was hard to tell if your eyes were really open, and the murmur of the brook was like a lullaby. “Very pretty, Raeder. Very neatly done,” it kept repeating softly.

No, it would not do to drift away upon that whispering stream, into dreams from which there might be no awakening. He must keep thinking about something. And what had he been thinking when the rotten ground caved in beneath his feet and plunged him headlong down into this gully?—Ah yes! The old man and the young one running

from the barn, a father and his son,—the bicycle tire punctured by a bullet,—the darkness and the rain and that endless muddy road,—and then. . . .

“Good evening—” she had said, leaning with her hands spread on the table and her head quite close to his.

He saw her face again, dark and very pretty, with red stuff on her lips and a flower in her hair,—not like Martha in the least. Her dress was beautiful,—some kind of shimmering stuff and cut so low that, leaning toward him as she was, he could plainly see the white curve of her breasts. And there was a scent of perfume—

“Good evening—” she had said again before he found his senses. And then he had jumped up and stood beside his chair, feeling awkward and confused in his dripping, muddy clothes.

“Fräulein, please?”

He had been sitting at a table by himself in a corner of the room close to the door,—a large room rather dimly lighted, with colored paper streamers hanging from the ceiling. At one side was a bar with a man in a white coat, and in between were tables grouped around a patch of dance floor. A

mechanical piano was playing noisily and a few couples were dancing, but most of the guests were sitting at the tables, drinking and laughing, or sometimes in silence, huddled close together. At the far end from the door was a staircase which led to private rooms, for the place made pretense of being a hotel. It was in fact that road house of shady reputation where the farmer had gone to telephone.

Trudging along the road in a daze of grief and wretchedness, pushing his useless bicycle, he had come upon the light shining through the trees, and presently had heard the sound of music. He was cold and wet and staggering with fatigue, and suddenly he thought he would stop to rest a while, and perhaps could get a tire to replace the punctured one,—at least it would do no harm to try. The music and the voices drifting out into the night, had finally decided him.

He had paused in the road to count his money and, finding that he had two or three marks, had left his bicycle propped against a post and gone into the place; and then he had not known what to do. No one had taken any notice of him and the

man behind the bar did not seem a proper person to ask about a tire. He had stood there for a while looking at the people who were all strangers to him, and then had sat down at a table near the door and, when the waiter came, had ordered beer. And he had been sitting there, not really noticing, but just pleasantly aware of the warmth and of the music—

“Fräulein, please?”—Yes, that’s what he had said, as politely as he could. And the girl had looked at him as if she were surprised, the smile half fading from her lips.

“Oh!—Do I disturb you?”

“Oh no, Fräulein—” he hastened to assure her, trying to conceal his muddy boots beneath the table.

“Are you alone?”

“Alone?—Why yes, Fräulein.”

“Oh—” She looked close into his eyes with a pucker in her brow between her own,—questioningly, as if she were uncertain of herself, and then she smiled again. “May I sit down with you?”

“Yes, certainly Fräulein—” He moved a chair.

“Thank you—” She sat down, watching him across the narrow table on which there was a

candle underneath a paper shade. He was horribly embarrassed; he did not know what to do or what to say. Never in his life had such a thing occurred,—this beautiful lady, so elegantly dressed, but just a girl in fact, not much older than himself—

“What is your name?” she asked.

“Raeder.—Stephan Raeder, Fräulein.”

“Stephan—” She nodded, repeating it again beneath her breath. “That is a pretty name. My name is Mimi.”

“Oh, thank you, Fräulein—”

“But not really. Just here I am called that.” She laughed softly at the expression on his face. “When I am at home I am called Eva.”

“Oh—”

“Which do you like best?”

“Which, Fräulein?” He was terribly afraid of saying the wrong thing. “Well—Eva—”

“Yes, so do I.” She laughed again and shrugged and spread her hands upon the table,—soft, white hands with painted nails and rings with glittering precious stones,—colored glass, had he but known. And then she frowned, still watching him with

curious intensity. "Why do you shiver, Stephan? It is not cold in here."

"Oh no, Fräulein!—But—"

"But what?" She reached across the table and put her hand upon his sleeve. "But you are dripping wet—"

"No, please—" He drew back quickly, conscious of the pressure of her fingers on his arm. "The rain, Fräulein—" he mumbled. "It is of no consequence."

"No consequence?" She looked at him so searchingly that he turned away his eyes. "Do you mean you have been *walking* in such weather?"

"Yes—" He tried to reassure her with a smile. "I—well, you see—" The waiter interrupted with his beer.

"And what will the lady have?" he said.

"Nothing." She shook her head.

"Yes, please—" Stephan urged, sick with terror at the thought of his almost empty pocket. "Some refreshment,—what you like—"

"Nothing," she insisted. "But stop!" She beckoned the waiter to come back. "Beer is not good

when one is cold and wet. Rum would be much better, with lemon and with sugar."

"Oh no, Fräulein—" he stammered.

"Oh yes!" She nodded firmly, turning to the waiter. "Take away the beer. Bring the gentleman hot rum with lemon and with sugar,—steaming hot, you understand?—And I have changed my mind; I will have a brandy—" She leaned back across the table, smiling roguishly. "—just to keep you company."

"Thank you—" Stephan gulped, feeling in his pocket, counting with his fingers:—two marks thirty—forty—fifty,—not another penny, and the rum alone would certainly be more—

"What are you thinking, Stephan?"

"Thinking?" He started guiltily. "Why nothing, Fräulein—"

"Yes, but you are." She put her hand on his and lightly closed her fingers on his wrist. "I have money, Stephan. Do not worry about that."

"Fräulein, please—" His face was flushed and burning and he half rose from his chair.

"Come now—" Her fingers tightened on his wrist. "Are we to be such shabby friends as that?"

He sank back in the chair, trembling with confusion.

"I am sorry if I have been rude—"

"Yes?" She leaned back, smiling, watching him. "Well, I am glad. It is easy to be friends when one starts off like that."

"Two marks fifty, Fräulein,—that is all I have."

"I see—" She took a ten mark note out of her purse and put it in his hand. "You must pay the waiter."

"No—" He dropped the note as if it burned his fingers.

"Please."

"Yes, well—" He groaned. "I will pay what I have and the rest out of this note."

"Thank you, Stephan." She lit a cigarette and watched him through the smoke. "Now tell me, please: why have you been walking in the rain?"

"Oh yes, Fräulein—" He explained that he had been bicycling in the country with—some friends, but they had gone on ahead and it had grown late, and then a tire had been punctured. He had walked for some distance in the rain until, coming

to this place, he had stopped on the chance he might get another tire—

The waiter returned with the brandy and the rum. And while he paid the bill,—four marks fifty for the drinks and fifty for a tip,—she questioned the waiter on the subject of the tire: could a new one be obtained for the gentleman's bicycle?

"No." The waiter shook his head; nothing of the kind could be had in the establishment. He hurried away, not concerned about the matter.

"You see—" She laughed. "There is nothing to be done. You will simply have to stay here until morning."

"Oh no, Fräulein—" The idea was terrifying. "It is not far and I can walk."

"In this rain?—That would be stupid, and perhaps you would be ill. See now—" She leaned across the table with her fingers against his and a quizzical expression in her eyes. "I have a room upstairs. You can sleep there in my bed;—it is wide enough for two."

"Fräulein—" he gasped. "But excuse me,—your money—" He put the change into her hand and

two marks fifty of his own. "You are very kind," he stammered, "and I thank you, but—"

"As you please—" She shrugged and smiled, studying him intently, her elbows on the table and her chin cupped in her hands. "But you are a funny boy—"

"I am sorry if—"

"No, don't apologize!" She shook her finger at him. "The things you are ashamed of are the things that I like best. But come, let us talk of something else. And quickly drink that rum while it is hot, so that you don't catch cold." She raised her glass. "Your health, Stephan!"

"To you, Fräulein—" He touched her glass with his.

The rum was hot and strong; it tingled in his veins, flushed him with sudden warmth, crept swiftly to his brain. He was not much accustomed to liquor of this kind, and on an empty stomach, in his emotional state, and coming down with illness though he had not realized it at the time,—no, considering everything, what followed was not strange.

This girl whose knees touched his beneath the

table,—a beautiful young lady, elegantly dressed,—well, no matter what she might be, she was generous and kind,—not pretending to ignore him nor saying bitter things that were meant to hurt his pride, but asking for his friendship and perhaps much more than that,—really making love to him,—offering him herself,—though possibly she had not meant to put it in that way. Still, however that might be, was it reasonable to think that his lonely, aching heart could do other than respond to such sympathy and kindness?—But it had not happened quickly. No, there had been other steps—

“Stephan—” she said, “will you tell me something else?”

“What, Fräulein?”

“Why have you been crying?”

“Crying?—Oh—” He felt like such a fool. But she was not making fun,—not laughing at him.

“It was the first thing that I noticed when I spoke to you.”

“Yes, Fräulein. Well, it is true, I had been crying—” And he told her of the barn and the men who had run out, a father and a son,—and how they had been shot, and the dead one fastened on behind

the tire. It took rather long to tell it and she listened absently, nodding now and then.

"Well, such things happen in the world—" She shrugged, still watching him. "But why were you crying, Stephan?"

"Yes, Fräulein, about that—"

"No—" She shook her head.

"What then, Fräulein?" he said, but he could not meet her eyes.

"What then?" She seemed to turn the matter in her mind. "Have you a sweetheart, Stephan?"

"Yes—no—"

"Ah so?" She smiled. "A lover's quarrel perhaps?"

"No, Fräulein—" He bent his head to hide the tears which welled into his eyes, tracing with his finger in liquor which had spilled upon the table.

"A mistake.—Yes, that is all—"

"A mistake—" She nodded, sighing. "Well, such things also happen." She was not looking at him now,—giving him time to steady his emotion. "I had a sweetheart, too." Her voice had changed,—was suddenly so hard and cold that he glanced up

in surprise. "He went off to the war and he was killed."

"Killed?—Ah, Fräulein—"

"Yes—" She shrugged. "He said good-bye to me, and that was all. We were to have been married in a month. They sent me back the letters I had written and—" She took a metal disc out of her purse. "—and this,—his number which he wore upon his wrist."

"Yes, Fräulein—"

"And they wrote to me to say I would be proud to know he had died for the Führer and the Fatherland." She stopped the waiter who was passing. "Another brandy, please."

"And for the gentleman?"

"Nothing," Stephan said. Already he was burning as if he had a fever. She did not urge him.

"People must have love," she went on half to herself, "must give it and receive it. Otherwise they cannot live; and love is hard to find, and very easily lost." She was silent for a moment and, when she spoke again, her voice was as it had been. "And shall you soon be going to the war?"

"Yes, Fräulein, in a week I will begin my training."

"I see—" The waiter brought the brandy; she paid for it and drank it as if it had been water. And then she leaned again with her elbows on the table and her chin cupped in her hands. "And are you sure, Stephan?"

"Fräulein, please?"

"That it was—a *mistake*?"

"Oh!" He bowed his head. "Oh yes!"

"Will you tell me a little more about it?"

"If you wish, Fräulein—" he said, struggling to make order in his tangled, feverish thoughts. "But it is hard to know where to begin—"

"At the beginning, Stephan."

"Yes, well—" And he had told her of Martha and himself, from the time that they were children coloring picture books, for so closely had their lives been interlaced that almost everything he could remember in some way included her,—and of the birthday parties with the statuettes of sugar, of his father and his mother and old Anton cobbling shoes, of Paul and of Frau Becker, of Uncle Rudi, too, and the visit to the circus,—haltingly at first,

but then it had come pouring from his heart. And she had not interrupted to ask him any questions, just nodding now and then to show that she was listening.

And then he had spoken of the Labor Camp and Karl,—of the friendship that had grown up between them; and the ripening of his love for the playmate of his childhood, or the recognition of it, which had come quite suddenly in the Pomeranian forest; and the fine things he had dreamed and tried vainly to express in the letters which he had never posted; and of how he had assumed that it must be as he wished,—had foolishly taken it for granted.

And then he had come to these last few bitter days, beginning on the platform of the station when he and Karl alighted from the train and nothing had turned out as he imagined that it would; and how, bit by bit, all his hopes had been dissolved like castles in the air without substance or reality; of how he had been treated with contempt and with neglect, corrected or ignored, like a person who was merely in the way. But he had not understood and so he had gone on in grief and in confusion, accepting the abuse until today—

“Yes?—today?” she prompted.

“It is Karl, Fräulein, with whom she is in love—”

“But are you *sure*, Stephan?”

“Yes, yes—” he answered almost angrily, stumbling on through what remained to tell. His head was swimming now with fever and the liquor; and emotion, which had dulled, came surging back,—grief and fury strangely mixed. It was plain enough, he said, and he had been a fool not to see it from the start. He had realized the truth that afternoon, goaded by a taunt she had raked out of the past,—a final injury she inflicted to testify to her opinion of him. Yes, then at last he understood. And it had ended there in the road beside the barn when they had ridden off and left him,—at his bidding to be sure, for he did not mean to trouble them again—

“Stephan—” she put her hand upon his arm for his voice had risen harshly and people sitting near had turned to look.

“No, Fräulein, please—” He put her hand aside. “I am really not a child.—I have simply been deceived,—well, I recognize the fact,—such things happen, I suppose,—anyone can be mistaken,—it is

so that one must learn—" He had gone on in this fashion with disconnected phrases, and then suddenly he had begun to sob,—just as he had done when he trudged along the road,—deep, choking sobs which he could not control.

"Stephan, Stephan—" She stood up quickly, screening him from people whose attention was attracted.

"Forgive me, Fräulein, but—I cannot help it—"

"Yes, yes, I know—" She put her arm around his head and drew it close against her breast.

"It is not for her that I am crying.—No, Fräulein, I assure you—"

"I understand—"

"It is something else, Fräulein—" Her breast was soft and cool against his burning cheek. "Yes, something else entirely:—those men the soldiers shot,—the father and his son—"

"Hush now—" She held him closer, stifling his sobs against her dress. The waiter had come up and was staring at them doubtfully and some of the guests had risen from their chairs. The man in the white coat came hurrying from the bar.

"What is the matter here?"

“Nothing—” the girl replied.

“The boy is drunk,” somebody said.

“No—” Stephan stumbled to his feet, clinging to his chair. “Why do you say a thing like that?—because you are cruel,—because you want to hurt me—” Several people laughed. “No,” he shouted wildly, “I am not drunk—I am not drunk—you understand?”

“Stephan—” she cautioned softly and took his hand in hers. The man in the white coat was frowning angrily and motioning to the waiter.

“Put him out,” he said.

“No.” She did not raise her voice. “The boy is not drunk, but he is ill. I will take care of him. Leave it to me.”

“Well—” He shrugged. It seemed he did not wish to make an issue with her.

“Come, Stephan—” she said and led him by the hand through the long room, threading her way between the crowded tables, not hurrying her step, not glancing to the right or left, heedless of the mocking faces. “Come, Stephan—”

And he had gone with her, clinging to her hand, half blind with the tears that were streaming from

his eyes, stammering broken phrases through his sobs. "I am not drunk, Fräulein.—I ask you to forgive the trouble I have caused.—But they should not say such things.—They want to hurt—to kill—because they are unkind.—I am not drunk.—No, something else entirely.—I ask you to forgive—"

"Come, Stephan, come—"

"Please understand, Fräulein,—well, I am not a child,—but something that occurred which I did not foresee.—Yes, that has been the cause.—You have been very kind to me.—I ask you to forgive—"

They had come now to the stairs and had started to go up. It was then that a voice had called his name. But so great was the confusion of his mind, so thick the fog in which he was enveloped, that at first it had meant nothing. But the girl had stopped and faced about, and then, still holding fast his hand, she had come down one step to place herself between him and the person who had called. And she had stood there waiting,—looking down into the dimly lighted room.

"Stephan!"

This time the voice had pierced through to his

brain, and panic, for a moment, chilled the fever in his veins and swept the fog away.

"No, no—" he groaned pulling at her hand.
"Fräulein, let us go—"

"Wait, Stephan—"

Yes, that was how it happened. It was amazing how much he could recall out of that sickening nightmare,—how vividly the picture, which he seemed not to have seen, came back now before his eyes:—the dimly lighted room with the colored paper streamers hanging from the ceiling,—the paper shaded candles and the people at the tables, flattened out against the floor as he looked down from the stairs,—and the couples on the dance floor, swimming to and fro in a haze of cigarette smoke,—the piano which kept playing without help from human hands,—the expression in her eyes as she looked up at him—

"Wait, Stephan—" she had said, smiling to reassure him, repeating with her eyes the words that she had said to the man in the white coat. "I will take care of him. Leave it to me—" And he had felt the pressure of her hand, firm and cool and confident. But still he could remember the thin

line of her lips,—the way that they had looked when she told him of her sweetheart: tight and hard. Yes, it seemed that all these things were in her face—

And suppose she had not heard the voice,—or that it had come a moment later? Suppose she had not stopped and waited to find out;—suppose she had not cared, or had yielded to his urging?—What would have happened then?—What would have been the outcome of that night?—the future of his life?—But she had stopped and waited.—She had been kind to him,—yes, very kind. . . .

The memory broke and fled; the picture vanished from the screen. His eyelids had been drooping,—perhaps they had been closed, but they were wide open now. Every muscle of his body was quiveringly alert.—Some sound he had been hearing but had not been aware of, that his relaxed attention had not properly announced.—An unfamiliar sound:—not the murmur of the brook which had never stopped from singing, “Very pretty, Raeder. Very neatly done.”—not the patter of the rain among the leaves, not the rustling of the

branches, not doves or pigeons cooing,—and not imagination—

Something was moving over there beyond the stream,—cautiously approaching—

It was at this very moment that Dr. Hess, leaning wearily against the fender of the car, observed in the sky the first evidence of dawn.

A twig snapped sharply; a stone turned under foot.—There was no mistake about it. It had been going on, coming closer all the time. Someone was creeping through the brush,—someone or several,—fumbling in the dark. But it was no longer dark,—or less dark than it had been; the foliage of the trees was taking form against the sky—

He got upon his knees and then he stood erect, taking care to make no sound. It was slow and painful work; his limbs were bruised and cramped, and his injured angle throbbed beneath his weight.—Another twig cracked noisily. He was certain he could hear the rustling of the leaves as they were pushed aside—

Not one, but more than one, he was sure from the sounds.—He heard again his captain's voice in dry and casual warning: "We can expect no quar-

ter—"No quarter—no quarter—" he repeated to himself. The words had meant so little at the time. He had never grasped their meaning until the present moment,—that he was outside compassion, beyond pity, beyond mercy, outlawed by mankind,—regarded as a viper to be ruthlessly destroyed.—Well, a viper had its fangs and cornered it would strike and fight until it died.—His hand felt for the bag upon his breast, found the zipper in the edge and slid it down—

But then his rational mind began to function.—Steady now!—How could they know that he was there?—or knowing it, imagine they could find him in the dark?—What nonsense!—Hope flamed in his heart and relaxed the icy fingers which had almost stilled its beating.—Not enemies, but friends,—fellows like himself, wandering in the dark,—detached and lost.—He must call out to them. Provided with a compass they could then go on together, and—it could not be much farther—

"Hello—" But twice he formed the word before his tongue could utter it, and then there was no answer save the steady, nearing rattle of the brush.—Perhaps they had not heard.—"Hello—" he called

again.—But of course they would not answer, not knowing who it was.—“Here is Raeder, second company—” A twig snapped in reply; the rustling of the leaves did not pause or hesitate. “Raeder, second company—”

The words died in his throat.—He could begin to see:—the movement of a branch—the outline of a figure coming toward him, emerging from the darkness and the mist, scarce a dozen paces distant across the narrow brook—

“Halt now!” he shouted wildly. “Stay back!” But the figure came straight on, lurching heavily without effort at concealment, plunging through the bushes which swayed and broke beneath its feet, looming shapelessly and hugely. “Halt!—Halt, I say!” His trembling fingers, groping in the bag, closed on a grenade. He snatched the pin out with his teeth. “Halt now—” He flung the thing—

An explosion shook the earth, and through it shrilled a choking scream of agony.—The concussion was so close that he was thrown down, showered with mud and pebbles.—There was threshing in the bushes,—the sound of strangled moaning, deep-throated, gasping breath,—then si-

lence.—Just the patter of the rain and the singing of the brook, “Very pretty, Raeder. Very neatly done—”

He lay for a long time face down where he had fallen, flattening himself against the ground, holding back his panting breath lest his shoulders move and disclose his human form, waiting and listening for any further sound.—There had been more than one; he felt certain about that. But perhaps the grenade had done for both, or as many as there were; the thing spread death in a wide circle. Yet only one had screamed; it still echoed in his ears, like nothing he had ever heard,—a sound compounded of agony and fear—

At length he raised his head, cautiously and slowly, looking out beneath his arm which served as a shield and as a decoy,—a trick that he had learned as far back as the Jungvolk.—Yes, it was lighter now, but the rain and fog were like a veil. He looked for a long time, but the bushes did not move nor was there any unfamiliar sound—

Still, he waited, as he had been taught to do. He was not frightened now, or rather, for the moment was unconscious of his fear, involved in the me-

chanics of a deeply sculptured pattern, functioning like a cog in a machine, forgetful of the fact that he was alone: an unimportant matter which the text books overlooked, which nobody ever mentioned, about which there were no rules. But he did not think of this. He was a soldier now,—on that promised battlefield whose elaborate reproductions had been the playgrounds of his childhood and the schoolrooms of his youth.

He found a pebble with his hand and, without raising his head, tossed it to one side,—a trick designed to misdirect attention. But there was no response,—no movement and no sound. He ventured now to crawl a little closer to the brook and, under cover of a willow, to get upon his knees. The bank across the way looked bare and steep, shelving at the foot into a brushy slope. Where the grenade had fallen there seemed to be a hollow in the bushes and a darkening of the mist,—dead smoke clinging wetly to the earth. It occurred to him now for the first time that he had killed a man,—or two, or more,—that the victim, or victims, of his hand were lying dead and torn in that bare spot on the slope. He had often wondered what it would be like,

how he would feel when he had killed; and he was surprised to find that the sense of it was dull, that he was strangely undisturbed. But he was still absorbed in the technique of action, still fighting for his life—

He got upon his feet, no longer aware of the throbbing in his ankle, and studied the ground through the foliage of the tree.—It was possible of course that there had been only one, though he could have sworn there were more. In any case the fact must be determined, and to cross the brook he must expose himself. He did not want to do this but he did not hesitate, did not reason with the question as to why he must advance and not retreat. His behavior in a given situation had been rigidly prescribed and admitted no alternatives. He was acting under orders. Sergeant Werner was there, at the far end of the line, and the captain was somewhere looking on.

He stepped out into the open and waded through the brook which continued to assure him, "Very pretty, Raeder. Very neatly done—" Yes, well— He nodded to himself. He had done what must be done. If someone had been killed,—well,

that was War,—the purpose of it, what it was about. All his life had been devoted to preparing for this moment. If a soldier did not kill, then what was a soldier for?—what excuse did he have for his existence?

He reached the other bank and crept slowly through the bushes, taking care to make no noise, holding back the branches so that they would not rustle, feeling for each step before he put his weight down.—But the man was dead of course. He had not got away and he had not moaned or cried as a wounded person would.—He need not take such precaution,—still, he had been taught that way. Mopping up was tricky business for sometimes they would sham and take you unaware.—He felt in the bag for a grenade—

He was nearing the spot, keeping carefully under cover, moving from bush to bush, watching through the murk, listening for a sound, intent, alert. The still, wet air was acrid with the fumes of the explosive; he had come within the circle of the smoke.—The purpose of War was to destroy the enemy. If someone had been killed,—well, that was to be expected. The rules of the game were

very simple: you killed or—you were killed.—He stopped for a moment to study the terrain.—Yes, it was there, just beyond that bush.—Another step, another; he pushed aside the leaves.—Something moved, rushingly and noisily, scurrying to its feet—

“Halt now—” He jerked the grenade out of the bag, and then—

He saw it standing there, so close he could have touched it:—its wobbly little legs spread far apart, its big, soft eyes regarding him, surprised but unafraid,—a calf—a baby calf—

The grenade dropped from his hand; he did not pick it up. The mother lay there in the brush, blasted open like a melon. The calf had been nuzzling at her side—he could see the impression in the grass—milking her teats which stuck up stiffly and grotesquely like the fingers of a hand. It stood there staring at him—questioningly, he thought. There was a thread of milk upon its lips and a streak of blood across its small white face.

“Ach now—” he said, as he would have spoken to a child. “I am sorry, but—I didn’t know—” He held out his hand but the calf drew back a step

with lowered head, gazing at him steadily—accusingly, he thought.

Corporal Cat and Corporal Calf!—He made a queer sound in his throat, half groan, half laugh; and suddenly he turned and ran, crashing through the bushes, splashing through the brook which seemed to mock him now. “Very pretty, Raeder. Very neatly done—”

Corporal Cat and Corporal Calf!—He fled on, stumbling blindly through the brush, no longer unaware of the throbbing in his ankle, of his bruised and aching body, and scrambled up the bank whose rotten edge had pitched him down out of the night. And he knew now well enough that Werner was not there at the far end of the line and the captain was not somewhere looking on. The pattern of the battlefield had suddenly dissolved and vanished in the soft eyes of a calf. There was no technique of action applicable to his need; the machine which had made him, had abandoned him.

At the top of the bank he paused for breath. The gray dawn was opaque, like a sodden, woolen blanket drifting in the air; the horizon confined

beneath a saucer. There was nothing to suggest the directions of a compass, but behind him he could see, floating hugely in the sky, the black outline of the Mountain. That way there was no thoroughfare.

He ran on, heedless of his course, down steeply tilted ground, slipping and stumbling on the stones, dodging the thorny bushes which had impeded his ascent, through clumps of scrubby trees, in and out of narrow gullies which cut across his path; and the horizon ran with him a few paces in advance. He had only one thought: to escape out of a trap,—not the place he had been in nor the perils he had feared, nothing physical in fact, but something deeply subtle which he could not put in words,—a nameless terror which was close upon his heels, which running would not distance.—Still, he ran—

Corporal Cat and Corporal Calf!—It was mixed up with that.—Old Anton's face appeared out of the mist, the spectacles pushed up above his nose, and again he heard the gentle, thoughtful voice. "A calf and a soldier are very much alike—" Yes, that's what he had said, and perhaps there was some truth in it,—something to explain the strange kinship

which he felt for that helpless little creature with the milk thread on its lips and the narrow streak of blood across its face.

He came to a fence and crawled between the wires, careless of the barbs that pricked his flesh. The ground was not so steep now and there was meadow grass which clung wetly to his ankles. Old Anton's face had vanished and he was in the shop, standing on the counter, looking into Uncle Rudi's eyes. "Listen to me, Stephan, and remember what I say: Don't let them make a soldier out of you." And then Uncle Rudi had gone out and banged the door, and he had not come back, not once in all the years.—Well, perhaps he had been right, but what else was there to do?—what else to be?

His pace had slowed; he was panting with exhaustion. But there was something else that shod his feet with lead: a foreboding of inexorable disaster.—What good was it to run?—The nameless terror that he fled was not following at his heels but all around him,—closing in from every side. The trap from which he was struggling to escape was clamped upon his back. Every effort that he made

only served to tighten it. And it was not something new which had just happened now, for the shadow of the thing went far back into his life, like the shadows on the sand in that nightmare of his childhood,—something he had sensed in his father's empty sleeve and bitter eyes, in the death of little Emil, in Paul and in Frau Becker, in Dr. Ludwig Heinkel, in the old man and the young one running from the barn,—when he trudged along the road in the darkness and the rain, pushing his useless bicycle,—when he stood there on the stairs, looking back into the room—

He came upon the body without warning;—a pace or two to right or left and he would have passed it by. It was almost concealed by the grass in which it lay, sprawled flatly on its face, half buried in the ground,—like a stain upon the earth. He stopped and stared at it and gradually he saw that it had a human form, but in only two dimensions,—like those cookies made of gingerbread and fashioned into figures. He came a little closer. Something glistening caught his eye and he stooped to pick it up. It was buried in the ground, just the end of it in sight. While he held it in his hand the

rain washed off the mud and he recognized—his knife,—the knife he had dropped in some half forgotten time when the cut end of the rope had whipped back around his arm.

It was all remote and vague,—like something he had read or of which he had been told, not pertaining to himself. And then suddenly he knew with a sickening shock of horror:—there had been someone there, tugging like a fish in that net of broken ropes,—someone dangling helpless, but alive perhaps and hoping,—and he had cut him loose,—and this was what was left.

“Not Karl—” he cried aloud. And he kneeled down on the ground, but it was long before he could bring himself to touch the mud-caked, slippery rags. And he knew before he looked,—before, digging with his fingers, he could lift and turn the head,—before the rain had washed it clean enough to see—

“Yes, Karl—” he said, and sat back numbly in the grass.—His friend whom he had loved.—But the sense of it was dull, like something denied but long expected,—not a terrifying matter like the soft eyes of the calf,—or not terrifying now because of that.

—It did not seem strange to him that he had found Karl's body, that they should meet again in time and space beneath this tiny saucer of the sky. Stranger if he hadn't, stranger if he had passed by, for then a fragment of the pattern would have been incomplete,—a signpost missing from the road.

“Yes, Karl—” he said again, nodding slowly to himself.—Well, such things happened, that was all; nobody was to blame.—Dangling in the sky in the tatters of his chute,—there was no other end. He had been spared at least shearing off upon a fence.—He caught his breath and looked down at the knife. The pattering rain began to whisper in his ear, “Very pretty, Raeder. Very neatly done—”

“Ah God—” He hurled the knife away into the grass. All their brief life together was running like a film before his eyes:—skiing in the woods of Pomerania, feasting on rabbit stew at Dr. Heinkel's table, poking in the ruins of the hut, hiking through the forest in the spring time, swimming in the summer, working side by side or stretched out on their bunks exchanging confidences, talking of their plans and of their dreams, coming home together,—and that one misunderstanding which had

nearly wrecked their friendship— But Karl had come back to look for him. . . .

“Stephan!”—At first he had not recognized the voice through his fever and the rum, had not really heard it. But the girl had stopped at once and, still holding fast his hand, had come down a step below him, as if meaning to protect him.

“Stephan!”—This time he knew that it was Karl, and his only thought had been to get away.

“No, no—” he groaned, pulling at her hand. “Fräulein, let us go.”

“Wait, Stephan—” she said.

And then he had looked down into the dimly lighted room with the colored paper streamers and the people at the tables, and had seen Karl standing there at the bottom of the stairs,—in a rubber coat which glistened with the rain.

“Stephan!”

He dared not answer because he was still sobbing, lest he should disclose his naked shame. But grief and fury surged back in his heart.

“What are you doing here?—Where are you going?”

"No—" he gulped and turned away, tugging at her hand. "Fräulein, please—"

"Wait now—" she cautioned softly.

"But you don't know what you're doing." Karl came running up the stairs. "Stephan, you are drunk."

"No," he shouted, suddenly beside himself, "that is a lie—a lie!" People turned their heads and the man in the white coat came hurrying from the bar. "I am not drunk, I tell you.—Why do you want to hurt me?"

"Stephan—" Her fingers tightened on his hand, and she turned back to Karl who had stopped still in amazement. "He is not drunk but ill."

"Ill?" Karl looked at her doubtfully.

"Yes, ill.—What do you want with him?"

"I am his friend," Karl said.

"No—" He shook his head, not shouting now, but sobbing and hysterical. "That is a lie, Fräulein."

"But, Stephan, you are mad."

"No, no—" He kept twitching at her hand. "Fräulein, let us go."

"Wait now—" she said again, and then to Karl, "What else?"

"What else?" Karl stood there, determined but perplexed, fumbling with his cap. "We came back to look for him."

"We?" The word burst from his lips.

"Yes, naturally, Stephan,—Martha and I."

"But—*why*?"

"Why?—She was worried when you didn't come,—afraid that something might have happened."

"A lie," he sneered.

"Ah, Stephan, no!"

"Go on," she said.

"But there is nothing more." He shrugged, twisting at his cap. "I recognized his bicycle standing at the door, and I came in to look."

"And—Martha?"

"She is waiting in the road."

"Ah so?" She nodded slowly and the pressure of her fingers was relaxed.

"Mimi!" The man in the white coat spoke roughly from the bottom of the stairs. "Look now, there has been enough of this."

"Yes, enough—" she answered with a strange smile on her lips. "And it is finished, Hans. You can go back."

Yes, that had been the way of it. And the man had gone back, grumbling, toward the bar; and Karl had stood there waiting, looking troubled but unyielding,—not unlike the way that he was looking now, with his chin set stubbornly and the wet hair curling backward from his forehead. But from where he sat he could not see the staring eyes. . . .

The piano was still playing and couples were still dancing on the narrow patch of floor between the crowded tables. But everything was swimming in a haze of cigarette smoke,—circling like a wind-mill.—So they had come back to find him, perhaps a little sorry for their treatment and abuse, for the lying, shabby trick that they had played. Well, it was too late for that. He had finished with them both, and he was not a child to be made a fool of twice—

"Stephan, come, let us go home," Karl pleaded from beneath him on the stairs.

"No."

"Be reasonable for once."

"No."

"Martha is waiting for you in the rain."

"I never want to see her face again."

"You don't mean what you're saying."

"Don't I?" And he laughed.

"I will not go without you."

"Yes, you will. Go now and let me be."

"Stephan, please."

"No, I tell you. No."

"Must I drag you out of here?" There was grim resolution in Karl's eyes.

"No, you don't. Get back." He stumbled up a step, pulling at her hand which tightened to detain him. "Fräulein, quick—"

"Wait now!" She stood squarely in Karl's path. "He is ill as I have told you. You can see it for yourself. He should not go out into the rain."

"Yes, but—" Karl hesitated, impressed but obstinate.

"You can bring her here," she said.

"Bring her here?" he repeated vacantly.

"Yes, here. It will not hurt her."

"But—"

“Up these stairs and to the right along the hall—” She pointed with her hand. “My room is number three; it is painted on the door.”

“But—” Karl stammered weakly, “—perhaps she will not come.”

“Yes—” She nodded smiling. “Yes, I had thought of that. It is something to find out.”

“But—”

“We will be waiting there.” She turned away and slipped her arm through his. “Come, Stephan, let us go.”

And he had gone with her up the stairs, along a narrow, dingy hall, into a little room with almost nothing in it but a bed,—protesting feebly all the way, confused and giddy, only half aware of what she had proposed. And she had not troubled to explain. Once inside the room she had stripped his soggy jacket from his shoulders—

“Ah, Fräulein, please—” he mumbled, embarrassed by such intimate attention. But she pulled the jacket off and hung it on a chair.

“And now you must lie down on the bed.”

“Oh no—” he gasped,—to lie down on her bed; he could not do such a thing.

"Yes, Stephan." She fixed a pillow underneath his head and spread a blanket over him, and then she unlaced his muddy boots.

"Fräulein, no!" He raised up on his elbow. "But you will soil your dress—"

"My dress!" She laughed, but it did not sound like laughing; and she pulled off the boots, careless of her gown, and set them in a corner. And then she came and sat beside him on the bed and put her hand upon his forehead. The touch of her fingers was deliciously like ice. "Ah yes—" She nodded with a pucker in her brow.

"It is nothing, Fräulein, nothing," he assured her. But her face was strangely blurred, sometimes close to his and sometimes far away.

"Of course," she agreed, and added to herself, "We will see what must be done."

"When I have rested for a while—" He was finding it difficult to speak and something in his chest was cutting like a knife. "—well then I can go home."

"Yes, naturally, Stephan."

"I beg you to forgive all the trouble I have caused."

“Do you?” She laughed again. “But you are a funny boy.” And then suddenly she stiffened and sat straighter on the bed. “Hark now!” There were footsteps and voices in the hall. “Yes—” she said, as if she were speaking to herself. “And now you will see how easy it is to be mistaken—about anything in life.” There was a knock upon the door. Suddenly she bent her head and kissed him on the lips. “Good-bye, Stephan,” she whispered, and she got up quickly and went out into the hall.

And he had waited, lying on the bed, not knowing what she meant or what he waited for, and not caring very much. The figures in the wallpaper were dancing up and down, approaching and receding. He dozed and waked, and dozed and waked, and then the door was opened—

“Fräulein—” he muttered and, when there was no answer, turned his head.

Martha was standing in the doorway.

At first he thought that he was dreaming, that if he kept on looking the phantom would dissolve or turn into something else. But the figure did not vanish:—the raincoat gathered close about her

neck, the soft blond hair wetted tightly to her head. She was gazing at him strangely.

"Martha—" He tried to rise, to get upon his feet, but his arm would not support him and he fell back on the bed.

"Stephan!" she cried. "Oh, Stephan, Stephan—" And she ran to the bed and kneeled down at his side, her arm beneath his head, her cool, damp cheek against his burning face. "It is all my fault,—all mine—"

"Oh no—" But he really had not understood, not anything except that she was there.

"I thought you didn't care and I was hurt and angry." He felt her tears against his cheek. "I have always loved you,—always. Do you understand me, Stephan?"

"Yes, Martha."

"Oh, Stephan—" She raised her head, looking down into his eyes. "What things we do to each other and ourselves when we are frightened."

"Yes—" He nodded, trying very hard to smile. "—when we are frightened, Martha."

And that was the last he could remember: "—when we are frightened, Martha."—the last out

of that endless, torturing night. He had seen her face, and Karl's behind her, floating in the air, approaching and receding, and then—well, he had fainted. . . .

Good, loyal, stubborn Karl who had come back to find him, who had stood there on the stairs with such grim determination in his eyes,—those eyes which were so strangely empty now—

Some sound or psychic warning made him turn his head. A child was standing on a little rise of ground, not five paces from the spot where he was sitting,—a barefoot boy of ten or twelve, with a scrap of oil-cloth pinned about his shoulders. A rough-haired shepherd dog was standing at his side. They were staring at him, motionless and silent.

“Ach now—” he muttered, dully startled. His first reaction was relief: he was not alone in a deserted world, not utterly abandoned. A shepherd boy, he thought, out early with his flock. He peered into the mist but saw no sheep, and then he looked back at the boy. They continued for some moments to stare at one another until at last the child moved back a step. And suddenly fear clutched at his heart: the boy would tell. He

scrambled to his feet with a smothered exclamation, but the moment that he moved the child was off, running swiftly with the dog close at his heels.

"Stop now!" he shouted, stumbling up the slope. "Stop now, you boy!—Come here!" But the boy ran on, not looking back, and the dog ran with him, barking. The sheep were there, huddled close together, but the boy detoured to circle past them.

"Come back, I say!—Come back!" It occurred to him that he was wasting breath, that the child would not understand his German tongue, not a single word he uttered, and would only be alarmed by unintelligible sounds. To shout at him had been a blunder. There was nothing to do but run after him and catch him,—yes, and quickly too, before he disappeared behind the curtain of the mist. By running through the flock he might gain a little bit—

But he did not gain by it. The sheep stood in his path or ran in frightened groups to intercept him; he had to dodge and kick his way among them. When at last he had got through the boy was far ahead and almost out of sight. Another blunder. He gritted his teeth and set out in earnest to run

the quarry down. His ankle was uncertain but he was careless of it and scarcely conscious of the pain. The way was down a gentle, rolling slope and the meadow grass was higher; it clung to his ankles and tangled in the laces of his boots. If only he were barefoot like the boy—

But he began to gain upon the child whose little legs took two steps to his one. With a thrill of exultation he watched the distance narrow: a hundred meter lead shrink to fifty bit by bit. He was running at the limit of his speed, perhaps as he had never run before; he was running for his life. His heart was pounding like a hammer on his ribs; his breath came in gasps from his parched throat; sweat trickled with the rain drops on his face. If only he could get his second wind and relax this agony of effort—

The interval between them was steadily diminishing:—forty meters—thirty—twenty— His head was clamped in bands of iron which were being drawn tighter; the pulses in his temples tried in vain to beat them loose. A hedge loomed up out of the fog. He must end the chase before the fox took cover, and he summoned every atom of his

will.—Ten meters now—now five— He shut his eyes and when he looked again the hedge was close at hand and the boy almost within his reach. But he would not chance the effort until he should be certain of success.

And now the child looked back with panic stricken eyes. He too was at the limit of endurance. The dog was running easily at his side with breath enough to bark. For a moment they held the pace together, and then— He reached to seize the little figure, touched the scrap of oilcloth, almost clutched it with his fingers—but the child, with a strangled cry, dove forward on his face into the hedge,—slid on his belly underneath the hidden wire of a fence.

The unexpected wire struck him like a sling shot and flung him sprawling backward to the ground. He was up in an instant and crawling through the strands but his frantic haste was fatal. The barbs snagged in his clothes, and when he ripped them loose, snagged relentlessly again. Still at last he did get through, with bleeding hands and a ragged cut upon his cheek. But the child was fifty meters in advance. It was all to do again.

He wanted to give up, to drop down in the grass and lie there in the rain forever. It seemed to be no use:—the figure he pursued was in some way attached to that vague and nameless terror from which, a while ago, he had been fleeing. It was not to be run down, and the end toward which it sped was not to be averted. It was part of a pattern from which there was no escape. Still, he ran,—staggering, almost blind, not gaining now but losing ground. And then when it seemed he could not take another step, suddenly he got his second wind. His heart stopped hammering on his ribs; his lungs were filled and he was breathing easily; the bands of iron on his head relaxed. He could run on to the very end of time.

Forty meters—thirty—twenty— He was gaining rapidly:—the boy would not escape and would not tell.—Ten meters—and then five— The child was weakening, faltering. He was almost at his side. But he would not blunder this time by grabbing from behind; he would overtake him first and cut him off. There was no hedge to intervene, no scrap of cover anywhere. He drew up side by side, and

the child glanced sidelong at him with those terror-stricken eyes.

"Stop now—" he gasped, forgetful that his words would have no meaning. "Stop now—I will not hurt you—" He could easily have reached and seized his shoulder, but something stayed his hand, perhaps those pleading eyes,—and then it was too late. The child dodged shrewdly to the side, and stopped dead in his tracks. And he had over-run him and was past him.—Quick now!—He tried to stop and turn, but his injured ankle failed and threw him forward on his face. In a flash the child was off.

"Halt! Halt!" He struggled to his feet despite the stabbing pain, and fell again. It was no use; the race was over. "Stop now!" The distance widened: ten meters—twenty— The boy would get away; he was powerless to stop him. He would get away and he would tell. And they would comb the fields until they found him,—men with guns and farmers with their hayforks,—until, alone and helpless, he was trapped like a rabbit in the corner of a fence. Terror mounted into panic. "Come back!" he screamed, kneeling in the grass. "Come

back or else—" He fumbled in the bag for a grenade, jerked the pin out with his teeth and flung it—

Again an explosion rocked the earth; dirt and pebbles filled the air and showered down upon him; and the greasy, acrid smoke spread like a pall, beaten earthward by the rain. The echo of the sound came rumbling from the Mountain, jeering at him with deep-throated laughter: "Very pretty, Raeder. Very neatly done."

"God,—no," he groaned, crouching on his knees, staring wildly through the murk. What demon had prompted him to kill a helpless child? He had been mad, frantic with frustration, beside himself with fear. The smoke spread thinner, clinging to the ground.—The boy and the dog?—He clasped his hands in trembling supplication.—Where?—where?—And then—yes, there they were, running safely far ahead.—Thank God he had not thrown far enough, that they had been beyond his reach.—The fleeing figures blurred and vanished in the mist.

After a while he got upon his feet and found that he could walk with limping, painful effort. And he went on slowly, without purpose or objective. His

senses were beaten dull; emotion had run dry. It was as if a curtain had mercifully descended to screen him from himself. The outcome of events was no longer in his keeping, had passed into other hands. The pattern was unfolding in obedience to a plan outside of his control.

He crossed a level field, through deep, lush meadow grass, guided by trees whose tops hung darkly in the sky. Close to the trees he came upon a fence and crawled beneath the wire. Beyond it was a narrow, tree lined road. He found a branch that he could reach and broke it off to serve him for a staff, and then he waded through a muddy ditch in which the frogs were croaking, and stood upon the road.

Which way?—to right or left?—He chose the left and limped along the edge beside the ditch, instinctively prepared to take to cover.—He was lost; in some way he could not fathom, he had been—detached. His comrades were not here nor anywhere around. There was no sight or sound of war,—no hint of battle that he had not made himself.—Corporal Cat and Corporal Calf: soldiers in a vacuum.—And his friend whom he had loved, lying

dead somewhere behind him, half buried in the mud,—his friend who had come back to find him, and from whom he had fled in mad pursuit of nothing—whom he would not find again, no matter how he tried,—to whom he had not paused to say good-bye—

“Ach now—” He stopped abruptly. There was something in the road,—a pile of something. He approached it cautiously, poking with his staff. Wet, muddy, fabric— “A parachute!” He stared, and hope came flaming out of nowhere.

A parachute!—And it never crossed his thought that it might be his own, that in the few brief minutes of his flight he had retraced the torturous, endless progress of the night. Hope was born again, and magically the nameless terror exorcised away, confined in some far corner of his mind like a genii in a bottle.—He was not alone, abandoned to destruction,—not to be hunted down and killed in the corner of a fence. The boy would tell but that would not avail. His friends were here,—or somewhere close at hand, preparing for the battle which would presently take place. And Werner would

be there to tell him what to do, and his captain would be somewhere looking on—

If only he knew *where!*—He listened and he looked. There was nothing to be heard save the patter of the rain and the croaking of the frogs, and nothing to be seen within the narrow circle of his vision except the gaping panel in the fence whose wires he had cut, and this escaped his notice.

“Hello—” he called softly. “Here is Raeder, second company.” But that, he knew, was nonsense. Of course they had gone on to the point of assembly as they had been directed.—Yes, but which way?—*which way?*

He went on to the left, limping with quickened step, once more oblivious to his throbbing ankle. Some instinct seemed to point in that direction.—Wait now!—He caught his breath. Through the foliage of the trees across the way he had glimpsed the outline of a house. He recrossed the ditch and crept from tree to tree until it was well within his view:—a shabby looking house, unpainted and uncared for; the fence was falling down, the gate hung by one hinge, the garden in between was rank with weeds. Behind it was a big stone barn.

It stood on ground a little higher than the house, about a hundred paces from it,—quite alone, without a barnyard or a wall, or trees or shrubs around it. There were several slit-like windows in the stone work of the loft, designed for ventilation; the doors, which faced the house, were open. A covered vehicle of some sort was abandoned in the driveway with its shafts down on the ground. There was no sign of life except a solitary horse, standing bleakly underneath the dripping eaves. The house itself might have been deserted, but there were curtains hanging at the windows.

He had started to go on when he was startled by a sound which resolved into the chugging of a motor,—still far off but coming toward him. Instinctively he glanced about for cover. The road side was bare save for the trees whose naked trunks were useless for concealment. He could go back into the fields and vanish in the mist until the car had passed, but there would be other cars,—perhaps in search of him,—perhaps this very one. He must do something quickly.—The barn!—He could hide himself in there. From those slits high in the loft he could see and not be seen. He could stay

there in safety until his comrades came,—or at least until the sound of battle showed him where they were. A providential idea!—There was shrubbery at the side along the drive behind which he could creep, and then—an open space between it and the barn. But there was no chance that he would be observed; the people in the house were fast asleep.—He waded through the ditch and limped across the road.

Dr. Hess was watching him from the window of his office which looked out across the garden to the road.

Half an hour earlier, shortly after the explosion which had seemed to rock the house, he had heard a barking dog and had opened the front door to look out into the dirty, drizzling dawn, and presently had seen a child and dog running directly toward him through the field across the road,—a shepherd boy with a black smudge on his face. . . .

Yes, it was blood.—“Come now—” he said gently, and picking up the sobbing, breathless youngster in his arms, he carried him into the house.

“Gustav!” Clara called from the bedroom overhead. “Who is it? What is wrong?”

"A child who has been hurt."

"Hurt? How?"

"How should I know?"

"But Gustav—"

"Don't bother me. I'm busy."

"But—"

"Oh, go to sleep!" he shouted angrily and closed the office door. The dog had come in with him and lay panting on the floor. "Come now," he soothed, "we will fix this in a minute." He examined the wound,—a scalp wound, not serious at all but requiring several stitches. "It is nothing but a scratch." He smiled and nodded cheerfully, refraining from asking any questions. He saw that the child, in his state of pain and panic, was not in a condition to reply.

He administered a sedative and a local anesthetic, and then he shaved the scalp around the wound, carefully sterilized the jagged cut and deftly stitched the edges into place, talking all the time in a gentle, soothing voice: of the Mountain and the rabbits he had hunted on its slopes, of the sheep that grazed upon it, of the rough-haired dog whose anxious eyes watched his every move.

“There now, we are almost at the end.—Hold steady! Just a moment longer and we shall have it done.—I know it hurts, but you are brave.—Good! —Fine!” He spread some gauze and bound it with adhesive. “There! It is finished.” He washed the blood and tears from the child’s face and spread a blanket over him. The sobs began to quiet; the sedative was working. “Can you tell me how it happened?—Well, I can guess. You fell and bumped your head.—No?—Perhaps you ran against a tree.—Not that?—Or were you climbing in the branches?—No?—Well, let me see: did someone throw a stone?—Ah so!—But tell me please—”

At last the child replied:—Two men,—there had been two, but one was lying down. He had been out early with his sheep and had come upon the men when it was barely light, and had stopped to look at them.—And what did they look like?—They were dirty with mud and the one who was not lying down, looked angry.—What were they doing?—Nothing.—How were they dressed?—In clothes that covered them all over, and one had on a thick round cap. He described it with his hands.

—Did they have guns?—No, he had seen no guns. But the angry one had a sack tied on his breast.

He had started to go back to his sheep because—well, he was frightened.—Of what had he been frightened?—As to that he could not say. Such men were unfamiliar to his eyes; he could only repeat that they were frightening. He had started to go but no sooner had he moved than the angry one jumped up and cried to him to stop.—Had he understood his words?—Yes, he had understood. The man had spoken German, but not the way they spoke it on the Mountain.—The doctor nodded thoughtfully.—The man had run after him and twice had almost caught him, and then there had been an awful noise and something had hit him in the head. But he had kept on running straight to the doctor's house which was the nearest one to where it happened. And the dog had stayed close by him. He had not seen the man again.—He sighed and snuggled in the pillow; his eyes were almost shut. The dog got up and licked his hand.

“Good dog,” the doctor said. He walked to the window and looked out across the rain-soaked, dreary garden. He was no longer thinking of the

child or the story he had heard. The child was present in the background of his mind, but his thought was of something else entirely.—*What had Herr Hintze written in his book?*—It was then that he saw Stephan limping furtively across the narrow road:—a shadowy, blurred figure, the color of the sky and of the earth,—a muddy, ragged figure, with a thick, round cap,—with a sack strapped on its breast.

“Ah God!” Would there never be an end to it?—Suddenly he had a strange sensation: a feeling that the greasy, leaden sky was shutting down on him, that he could feel the pressure on his head; the dirty rim of horizon was tightening like a noose and closing in. The illusion was so vivid that he had a sense of strangling, as if phantom fingers were clutching at his throat. The impression lasted but a moment, but the shadow of it lingered: an overwhelming feeling of oppression,—of *something closing in*—

The figure came on through the gate, skulking toward the house behind the shrubbery of the driveway, and presently vanished from the angle of his view. He went out of the office, through the

hall into the kitchen. His coffee had almost boiled away. He filled a cup and went on to the window which looked out toward the barn. The horse was standing underneath the eaves; the gig was in the driveway where he left it. He waited, cooling the coffee with his breath, wishing that he would not see, yet knowing that he must. The figure reappeared skulking through the shrubbery, and then it broke from cover, limped quickly up the open slope and disappeared into the barn.

He had known from the start exactly what would happen. And now what?—*what?* He was suddenly aware of the chugging of a motor. Herr Hintze was returning with the Home Guard at his heels. What should he say to him?—An enemy soldier is concealed here in my barn.—And what would Herr Hintze say to that?—and what would he write down in his book?—what ridiculous deduction might he not derive from such a simple statement of the fact?—Or suppose that he said nothing?—merely held his tongue?—What then if the soldier were discovered hiding in his barn?—what hidden implications might be involved in

that?—He gulped the coffee, pacing back and forth across the room.

Why the devil must the fellow have come here?—Well, he would take no part in it, would pretend total ignorance of the matter however it turned out. He was not a soldier but a doctor.—But stop a moment now! Suppose that there were others whom, as yet he had not seen,—a dozen of them hiding in the barn.—Yet why would they be there? And who could tell?—The loft of the barn stood high above the trees; perhaps they meant to use it to signal to each other.

And then there was the child asleep there in his office, whose story was not to be ignored but must be repeated to Herr Hintze in detail. One thing led directly to another. The parachute, the child, and finally this fellow,—all converging on his house and on his life, through no fault or omission of his own,—skillfully moved about like chessmen in a game, by a hand he could not see,—closing in on him.—The chugging of the motor was drawing steadily nearer. He waited by the window with his eyes upon the barn.

Herr Hintze was approaching in low gear, keep-

ing step, so to speak, with the Home Guard which he had no wish to distance. Herr Doblemann was seated at his side; Herr Schmitt, the butcher, occupied the rear. Drillmaster Kolb, the blacksmith, had been offered a seat but had preferred to march. He tramped through the mud close behind the car at the head of the column which splashed along behind him. There were some twenty of them. All of them had guns and a few had brought their bicycles, but Herr Kolb had forbidden them to ride. He was a stickler in military matters. They had gathered in Herr Wetzler's beer saloon and had waited there some time,—long enough to have had several rounds of beers. They were now both belligerent and facetious, disposed to call out jokes to one another.

“Silence!” barked Herr Kolb. He fell out at the side and surveyed them with a stern, relentless eye. “No talking in the ranks!” He corrected two or three who were marching out of step and then ran back to his place. Inside the car Herr Hintze was speaking to the mayor, replying to a question.

“The Gestapo,” he said coldly, “is not organized for military action in the field. And I am in at-

tendance on this operation in the role of an observer."

"Naturally, Herr Hintze," Herr Doblemann agreed.

"I do not give orders. Please take note of that."

"Oh yes, Herr Hintze."

"I offer advice, but not officially,—advice which you are free to follow or reject."

"Yes, please—"

"But I do not assume the least responsibility for anything you do or anything that may take place."

"Ah so?" Herr Doblemann wiped his sweating face.

"Kindly remember that."

"Oh yes, Herr Hintze. Thank you." The mayor leaned back and brooded darkly. He was nominally commander of the Home Guard, but commander *ex officio*. If anything went wrong Herr Schmitt would be to blame,—or *would he?*—A vital and uncertain question.—And then there was Herr Tinken, Luft-Schutz of the village, who was certainly responsible for something. He pondered with a sinking heart, wishing with all his soul that he were safe in bed.

At this moment Herr Tinken, still clutching his umbrella, was standing at the phone in Herr Doble-mann's back office. He had not known what to do but had felt he should do something. He had lingered for sometime on the fringe of the excitement and then, when the Home Guard was forming in the street, had finally mustered courage to pluck Herr Hintze's sleeve.

"Excuse me, please, Herr Hintze—"

"Well, Herr Tinken?—What?"

"Perhaps I should telephone to Herr Lieutenant Richter, the Luft-Schutz of the District?"

"Telephone?" Herr Hintze scowled. "Well certainly, of course. You should have done that long ago."

"Oh—" Herr Tinken quailed. "But excuse me please, Herr Hintze, you ordered me to wait."

"Ordered you?" Herr Hintze's expression was alarming. "Kindly understand that I do not give orders in military matters."

"Ah so, Herr Hintze?"

"You are Luft-Schutz of the village, are you not?" Herr Tinken nodded dully. "Then you

should know your duty." And he turned away and got into his car.

Herr Tinken, with his humble heart acting queerly in his breast, had rushed back to the office, and there he had been while interminable minutes ticked away, trying vainly to arouse Herr Lieutenant Richter who was sleeping soundly in a good sized provincial town at some distance from the scene.

"Hello—hello—" he pleaded and cranked the ancient instrument once more. "Herr Lieutenant Richter, if you please.—But kindly ring the bell again.—Yes, again, and do not stop. I assure you that the matter is official and important." He leaned against the wall, tracing patterns on the floor with the tip of his umbrella. Herr Hintze had certainly forbidden him to call at the time that he suggested it.—And now what did he mean?—What was the occasion for the expression in his eyes?—The whole thing was alarming and confusing. He had come when he was summoned and done what he was told. Somebody must give orders and if not Herr Hintze, who?—Herr Doblemann perhaps.

—He felt vaguely relieved.—Yes, Herr Doblemann must share any blame for the delay—

“Hello, hello,” he shouted. A sleepy voice had spoken from the other end. “Herr Lieutenant Richter?—Here is Herr Tinken, Luft-Schutz—”

“What?” Herr Lieutenant Richter had not long been in his bed from which he was now talking. He had spent the night carousing with a few congenial spirits and his head was aching badly. The phone had been ringing for some minutes in his dreams.

“Herr Tinken,” said the Luft-Schutz and also named the village.

“I don’t know such a place. What do you want?”

“A parachute has been discovered—”

“What?”

“A parachute, Herr Lieutenant Richter.”

“A parachute?—Well then?”

“It seems we are invaded by—”

“What’s that?”

“Soldiers of the enemy—”

“The enemy?—Ridiculous!”

“But there have been explosions—”

“What?”

“The sound of guns—”

“Are you drunk or crazy?”

“Excuse me, Herr Lieutenant—”

“Who are you anyway? What is your name?”

“Herr Tinken, junior Luft-Schutz—”

“I never heard of you.”

“Oh yes, Herr Lieutenant. You inspected me one day. The name is Tinken,—T i n—”

“Listen, Herr Finken, you have been dreaming things.”

“Oh no, Herr Lieutenant, if you please—”

“That is all I have to say. But kindly do not bother me again.” And Herr Lieutenant Richter hung up the receiver and reclined upon his pillow. His mouth tasted like flannel.—Some yokel who was drunk or some waggish friend who thought such things were funny.—Finken—Finken— He did not know the fellow. And the village? What the devil was the name?—A parachute. Absurd! The enemy was far away and fleeing for his life.—He pulled the bedclothes to his chin.—And explosions, eh?—Some farmer shooting rabbits.—The sound of guns— Humph!—Suddenly he was wide awake and

nearly sober.—Parachutes—explosions—soldiers of the enemy!—And suppose that it were not a drunken yokel or a joke—

He leaped out of bed.—Finken—Finken—and the village whose name he had forgotten.—He stumbled to the desk, turned on a light and found a little book. But there was no Finken in it.—Finken—Minken—Tinken— Something of the sort. He thumbed the pages with a sense of panic.—Suppose that it were true. What a devil of a mess!—Ah, Tinken, yes, of course. And the name of the village was there too.—He spread a map upon the desk but the village was so small and unimportant that he looked for a long time before he found it.—The man and the village both existed.—He went back to the bed, picked up the telephone and put in a call, official and important, to Berlin.—It was probable of course that Herr Tinken had been drunk, but Herr Lieutenant Richter was not taking any chances.

Herr Tinken did not know what to do; the Home Guard had departed and there was no one to tell him. Herr Lieutenant Richter had been extremely rude. Well, that was the way of people

in authority. He sighed and paced about the office, staring dully at the fly-specked travel posters. At length he sat down wearily near the phone, leaning with his chin on the umbrella handle. He did not know what to do.

Stephan found a ladder in the barn and climbed into the loft. It was a roomy place with deep loose hay piled high around the open well and hanging down untidily from the edges. The well in the floor extended to the door above which he perched himself. From this vantage point, looking through a narrow window, he was able to command an extensive range of view: the house, the driveway, broken sections of the road through the foliage of the trees, the fields beyond, and the open slope before the barn almost to the door. But there was a blind spot just outside the entrance, perhaps three meters wide, which the angle of his vision was not steep enough to cover. But this was compensated to considerable extent by the fact that, looking down into the well, he could see the entrance from the inside, and indeed a narrow space outside the door.—Yes, an admirable position for defense.

The floor of the barn was open like the loft. One stall had been reserved, doubtless for the horse that he had seen beneath the eaves. But the rest of the space seemed to be used for storage: old trunks, discarded furniture, and littered trash,—piles of boxes, rags, and papers, disorderly and dirty—not like a German barn.

He dug himself a pocket in the hay, a comfortable seat whence without moving he could see out through the window and down into the well. There was nothing to be seen; the house, the driveway and the road were silent and deserted beneath a shallow canopy of dingy, dreary sky. Rain pattered on the roof and trickled like a curtain from the eaves. The chugging of the motor was coming steadily closer; he could not imagine why it came so slowly.

He thought that he should eat and got out the tin of concentrated food. But the grimy cubes were dry and tasteless and he spat the stuff out of his mouth. He was not hungry; he was much too tired and sleepy. But it would not do to sleep, to relax his attention for a moment. He roused him-

self and took a leather wallet from his pocket. The rain had soaked into it and the things that he withdrew were limp and damp:—Martha's letter, the last he had received, and that, incredibly, was yesterday,—a snapshot of a cake with two sculptured figures on it, standing side by side, the cake her father made for their betrothal feast which had been celebrated on her birthday,—the faded picture he had always had, of Martha as a child, with flaxen pigtails tied with ribbons,—a scrap of paper, Uncle Rudi's telegram which had come a little late from some place in California. He spread it open on his knee.

“Dear Stephan, when the war is over I will send a present. I am sorry they are making a (censored) out of you but now it can't be helped. Good luck and love to both from Rudi.”

Good, kind Uncle Rudi, stamping in and out and slamming doors,—the legendary hero of his childhood.—Yes, well— He sighed and put the telegram away. It could not be helped, not now. He opened Martha's letter and read the last few lines.

"You will come back to me. I know that, Stephan. Be true to us, my dearest, to me and to yourself. I love you—love you—love you—with all my heart and always."

"Yes—" he nodded slowly and read the words aloud: "True to us, to me and to yourself." He was not certain what she meant but certain that in some way he had failed. He touched the letter with his lips and hot tears welled in his eyes,—tears that stemmed from frayed emotion,—from loneliness and fear. He wanted to cry out, to sob aloud, to run and hide his face upon his mother's knee, to be a child again held closely in her arms, comforted and safe. He shook his head and bit his lip to drive the tears away. "Come now," he said, "no nonsense!"

The chugging of the motor was at hand and something was moving through the trees:—a car with marching men behind it. So that was why it came so slowly.—His friends?—No, not soldiers,—men with guns but not in uniform.—Civilians hunting soldiers,—*hunting him*.

Dr. Hess was still standing by the window in the kitchen. He knew that the car was almost at the gate, but he had not decided what to do. He had been thinking things that were difficult to state—things he sometimes thought when he lay awake at night: he would seem to see the world receding from him, shrinking in size as it might look from a plane in flight through stellar space, until it was a ball of mud, and then a speck, then nothing. This contracting, shriveling process, leading always to extinction, was exceedingly depressing, but once embarked upon it he was powerless to stop it.

And it was receding now while he remained suspended in the sky. The curve of it was visible, the surface ironed out into a perfect sphere. There was no mystery left, nothing to explore, to dream or to conjecture. It kept rolling on its axis but all aspects were alike. Swiftly it whirled out upon its course,—no bigger than a pumpkin—than an apple—

“Honk! Honk!” The car had stopped.

“Ah God!” He jerked around. So they meant him to come running like a lackey to the gate. He put the empty cup down on the sink and went into the hall.

"Gustav!"

"Well?"

"What is it now?"

"Herr Hintze and Herr Dobleman," he said between his teeth.

"But what—"

"They have called to pay a visit."

"Not really, Gustav?"

"Honk! Honk!" Impatiently.

He went on to the door and down the path, and stood in the road beside the car, bareheaded in the rain. He described what had occurred in accurate detail, without any reservations. Herr Hintze listened coldly.

"We will see the child," he said.

"The child is sleeping now, Herr Hintze."

"Then we will wake him."

"Yes, but—" Dr. Hess was uncomfortably aware that he was stammering. "I have administered a sedative."

"A sedative?—And why?"

"To—to quiet him, Herr Hintze."

"Ah so?" Herr Hintze wrote something in his book. "We will go in," he said.

"Yes, certainly, Herr Hintze—" The doctor led the way into the house, pausing at the door to have his guests precede him. They looked into the office:—"To verify the child," he commented bitterly beneath his breath. But they did not try to wake him.

"There is a room, Herr Doctor, from which the barn is visible?"

"Yes, certainly, Herr Hintze. Kindly step this way." They went into the kitchen, leaving Herr Schmitt, the butcher, standing in the hall. Upstairs no voice was raised, but he knew that his wife had gotten out of bed and was listening at the door. He fancied he could hear the rustle of her nightgown.

Herr Doblemann stared blankly at the barn; he was sweating, and puffing like a porpoise. Herr Hintze took a field glass from his pocket and reconnoitered carefully. There was no sign of life except the horse which still stood close beneath the dripping eaves.

"There is no other egress from the barn?"

"None, Herr Hintze."

"But the man could have escaped when you came out to the car?"

"Well, possibly, Herr Hintze—" The doctor shrugged uneasily; he felt that he was walking on a precipice. "I—I understood you wished me to come out."

"Naturally, Herr Doctor." Herr Hintze made a memo in his book. "But you could have sent your wife, or she could have watched the barn."

"I did not think—" He paused abruptly, conscious again of the pressure of the sky, of phantom fingers closing on his throat.

"I would advise—" Herr Hintze turned to face Herr Doblemann. "—that this soldier in the barn be taken."

"Oh yes, Herr Hintze," the mayor agreed in startled haste.

"Alive if possible."

"Alive if possible," Herr Doblemann repeated.

"For purposes of information."

"Of information, certainly." The mayor rocked doubtfully on his heels. "But excuse me please, Herr Hintze, what procedure—"

"As to that—" Herr Hintze interrupted with a shrug, "—you must consult among yourselves: Herr Schmitt, Herr Kolb."

"Yes, of course, Herr Hintze. Thank you." Herr Doblemann backed hastily toward the door, paused to gulp, "Heil Hitler!" and went out into the hall.

"The High Command," the doctor muttered to himself,—cocksure, snooty fellows, arranging life and death in a field of pure mathematics while they looked out of windows, safely screened from bullets, from torn guts and blood.—He fingered a meat knife which was lying on the sink.—Mad, half formed thoughts came racing through his mind. Suppose he were to walk up to Herr Hintze, tap him on the shoulder, and look him in the eye. "Come now," he might say, "What have you written in that book?—A lot of lies and trash! Well, show it to me then. Produce it, if you please. Let's have it out between us, we two, as man to man."

But no, that would not do. The fellow would not answer him, would not produce the book. He would merely stare at him with those cold and fishy eyes. And then there would be something else to write. No, that was not the way. Suppose he took another course entirely. "Herr Hintze," he would say, politely but not fawning, "as one

human being to another, suspended and confined upon a ball of mud, spinning like a pinwheel through interstellar space, I would like to be your friend; I would like you to be mine. It is true that we may differ on superficial matters, but on fundamentals we are in agreement: we were born and we will die; we must suffer in our souls and in our flesh, for we cannot escape pain; here and there along the road we may find a little joy but there is not much of it; we must sleep and we must eat; and we must love, must know the comfort of a woman's breast against our cheek, the security of tenderness, that mystic sense of unity which, through our fleeting lives, we blindly seek. And so you see, Herr Hintze, that we are really brothers, bound tightly by our common kinship to each other and to all our fellow men. Let us be friends; here is my hand."

He stared at the back of Herr Hintze's flat skulled head with its military cap. No, that was both stupid and impossible. The fellow would not understand a single word of it,—would at best conclude that he was crazy and would write that in his book. There was no appeal to penetrate the

hide of their philosophy, no possible approach except— He started, his thumb on the sharp blade of the knife.—Suppose he were to creep behind Herr Hintze now—three stealthy steps would do it—and plunge the knife through his back into his heart. He knew exactly where to strike. It would only take a moment—

“Ah so!” Herr Hintze muttered, watching through the window.

“You—” He caught his breath. “—you spoke, Herr Hintze?” But Herr Hintze was absorbed and made no answer. Dr. Hess put the knife down on the sink and moved closer to the window.

Three men with guns were walking toward the barn, some paces distant from each other. They held the guns before them with the muzzles pointed down, like hunters in a duck marsh. He heard the clicking of the breech locks. Drillmaster Kolb, the blacksmith, was walking in the center and a pace or two ahead.

Stephan watched them coming up the open, muddy slope, blurred figures in the half light and the rain. A heavy, thickset man was in the center, walking steadily but unhurried. He kept glancing

to the right and left as if to urge the others to keep up, but they still lagged behind him.—Fifty meters—forty— The rest of them were grouped in the driveway at the right, far back beside the house, and partly concealed by the discarded gig.—Thirty meters—twenty—

He felt for a grenade and set his teeth upon the pin. He could not throw through the window; the aperture was narrow and the masonry was thick; there was no room to swing his arm. He could toss it a few paces but to do so would reveal his location in the barn and draw fire to the slit; the window would be useless for further observation.—Fifteen meters now— The blind spot underneath was about three meters wide. He must catch them before they came into its shelter or— He looked down into the well. He could toss it from the inside so that it would fall just outside the entrance. Yes, that would be the thing; it would not disclose the point of origin.

He waited with his teeth upon the pin. His mind was functioning perfectly and he was not afraid, involved once more in the technique of action. The promised battlefield had come to life

again; the machine embraced the cog. Werner was close by and the captain looking on.—Ten meters—five— The two at the sides were lagging farther back but the one in the center came straight on, steadily and unhurried, no longer glancing to the right or left. He could not see his face for he was high above him, looking down upon his head.

He twisted the pin between his teeth. Suppose that it should stick! But it came loose in his mouth. The man came on and vanished in the blind spot; the others were still within his view, several paces back. Another moment more—when he should see his legs silhouetted in the doorway— He waited, leaning out over the well, the grenade poised in his hand.—Now—now— He tossed it gently, deftly, aiming at the feet.

There was a flash of flame, a shattering roar of sound. The thick stone walls seemed to quiver from the impact. The concussion hurled him back, half buried in the hay. He heard the after sound of splintering wood: the big door ripped apart, collapsing into fragments. The well below was black with choking smoke. He scrambled to the window. The horse was galloping away with fran-

tic neighs of terror; two men were running back, faster than the smoke which spread flatly on the ground close at their heels. He looked into the well but he could not see or breathe, and he turned back to the window. The third man had not run; he was there outside the door.

Herr Doblemann stumbled up the back steps to the kitchen. His face was livid. "Herr Kolb—" he gasped. "Herr Kolb has not returned, Herr Hintze."

"So—" Herr Hintze nodded, watching through his glass.

"But, Herr Hintze—" the mayor leaned weakly with his hands spread on the sink. There were drops of sweat upon his wrists.

Dr. Hess ran from the room into the hall. He did not know what he was going to do, was not conscious of a plan. He knew only that he could not stay any longer in that room,—no, not another moment there with them. As he came into the hall he saw Clara on the stairs.

"Gustav!" she cried. "Oh, what has happened now?"

"Don't bother me," he shouted and ran into the

office. The child was moaning in his sleep. He snatched up his satchel and a towel and ran back into the hall.

"Gustav!" She clutched his sleeve.

"Don't bother me!" He jerked loose from her hands and ran out into the yard, around the corner of the house and down the driveway through the huddled men. "Come now, let me by!" They scattered from his path. Herr Schmitt was standing near the kitchen steps with the two who had come back. They were staring at the barn. The doctor pushed between them. "Out of the way!" he shouted and ran on toward the barn.

The smoke had thinned and Stephan watched him running up the slope, slipping in the mud,—a blurred, frail figure waving something white, and with a satchel in the other hand. Probably a doctor with a flag of truce, but he reached into the bag for a grenade and tried the pin between his teeth to be certain it was loose. Outside the wall below him there was nothing in his sight. He looked back into the well. The smoke had risen from the floor and was thick against the rafters of the loft. The door had fallen in but some fragments of it still

remained, hanging from the track on which it slid. The ground outside was caved in like a pit. And on the outer edge of it, where the angle of his vision was cut off by the framing of the door— He leaned as far out as he dared.—Yes, it was a hand, a human hand, clutching at the mud—

Dr. Hess ran straight on toward the door. He did not think of danger; he did not care about it. He was thinking of the knife he had felt against his thumb,—of how easy death must be compared with life. He could not run away from Herr Hintze and his book for they were merely symbols of the thing from which he fled, of which he was so terribly afraid: human ignorance—*stupidity* with all its implications of intolerance, brutality, and terror. And there was no escape. Herr Hintze and his book were up there in that sky which was slowly coming down and closing in.

He kneeled beside Herr Kolb. The drillmaster was dead, torn all to pieces, disemboweled. There was nothing to be done; he spread the towel to hide the dead man's face. In the act of turning back he glanced into the barn and saw without emotion a narrow tongue of fire creeping through the rub-

bish on the floor and licking toward the hay which hung down from the loft. He ran back to the house. Herr Doblemann was waiting by the kitchen steps.

"He is dead," the doctor said in a loud, defiant voice. The huddled men drew closer, murmuring to each other.

"Dead?" the mayor repeated in a hollow, frightened voice.

"Yes, dead and quartered like a beef."

"Ach God!" Herr Doblemann recoiled and wiped his dripping face, then frowned and shook his head. "But you should not have gone without permission. Herr Hintze is annoyed."

"Annoyed?" the doctor shouted, stamping with his foot upon the ground. "So Herr Hintze is annoyed! The General Staff—" And then he caught himself, mindful of the voice that was whispering in his ear. "Careful, you fool—be careful—" Herr Doblemann was staring at him strangely; Herr Schmitt was looking on with gaping jaw. "I am sorry," he mumbled. "Yes, I regret—" He sat down limply on the step with his satchel on his

knees. There was a pause. "The barn is on fire," he said indifferently.

"On fire?"

"Yes, Herr Doblemann, burning on the floor." He pointed with his hand. A thread of smoke was drifting from the doorway.

Stephan did not see the fire which was on his side and underneath the platform of the loft; and he did not smell the smoke because the barn was filled with the fumes from the grenade. He watched the doctor running back and saw him sit down on the step with his satchel on his knees and the others grouped around him. And then he heard an unfamiliar sound:—not the patter of the rain,—not doves or pigeons cooing, though he thought at first it might be,—a faintly crackling murmur, not above him but below. He lay flat on the hay and crawled closer to the edge.

And then he saw the widening tongue of flame creeping on the floor, trickling and dividing, spreading back beyond his view, licking upward at the hanging wisps of hay. Suddenly it caught and leaped crackling at his face. He beat it back with his bare hands, tearing the burning hay out

of the stack beneath him, as far as he could reach which was not far enough. And then it caught another place. He rolled and scrambled to it and tore at it again, adding to the fuel on the floor. And while he was at this it leaped and caught behind him. Another place, another, and another,—snapping, crackling, hissing like a snake, chattering words at him: “Very pretty, Raeder. Very neatly done.”

It was no use; the inexorable pattern was unfolding. As well to struggle with the tide or try to stay the planets. He sank back in the hay with his burned hands clasped around his knees. Black smoke poured from the well and sparks were whirling upward, falling everywhere. The loft across the way had caught. He watched the flame run up the stack like a waterfall gone backward. The well was ringed with fire. Suddenly his dormant senses woke.—The ladder!—Yes, and quickly or he would be cut off.

He crawled in frantic haste and could not find it in the smoke, and when at last he did, the wall of hay behind it was ablaze. He plunged down blindly, shielding his face against his arm. The

rungs were like hot coals. Sparks were smoldering in his clothes; he shook and beat them out. The flames had scorched his face, singed his eyebrows and hair below his helmet; the palms of his hands were welted with white blisters, but he was scarcely conscious of the pain.

Beneath the platform of the loft the barn was like a furnace, but in the open well the rubbish had burned out and the space around the door was clear of fire. He stumbled through the smoke and crouched against a fragment of the door which was still hanging from the track. Through a crack in the boarding he could breathe and he could see. But the men who had been huddled in the driveway were no longer there. Alone the seated figure on the step remained,—the doctor, bareheaded in the rain with the satchel on his knees.—The others?—where were they?—He searched the landscape.—Yes, there! Something had moved behind the cart. And something else was moving in the shrubbery at the right,—and on the other side beyond the fence, at the edge of visibility.

Yes, they were there, hidden from his sight but closing in,—stalking him like hunters. A cunning

trap the nameless terror had devised,—luring him on, each blundering, fatal step. And he was caught at last, like a rabbit in the corner of a fence— His eyes drew down. Outside the door a shapeless thing was sprawled with a towel across its face, one white hand reaching, clutching at the mud—

“Very pretty, Raeder. Very neatly done.” The crackling flames were singing at his back. The loft was blazing now and burning avalanches were sliding from the stack into the well. But he did not turn his head. His eyes were on the figure sitting on the step, watching through the rain,—as he had watched that other barn—

He was conscious of a strange sense of duality, an identification with the figure on the step,—as if in fact he were looking at himself. And suddenly he understood:—the nameless terror which had led him or pursued him, had caught up with him at last, or he had caught up with it. It was here at his side, so close that he could see its face. It was not what he had thought, yet really what he had in some way sensed,—not less fearful but familiar, not mysterious at all, not nameless any more,—not men with guns, not death which was waiting for him

there outside the door,—but his own life, for which he had been born, fattened and groomed and trained,—about which he had never had a choice.

Corporal Cat and Corporal Calf!—He smiled.—The terror had dissolved, had vanished when he looked into its eyes. No technique of action had driven it away; Werner was not there nor the captain looking on. The machine into which he had been built, had lost its hold on him; the cog was free. He was alone, but he was not afraid. He had found something in himself which had been buried deep beneath his fears:—his soul,—his own, imperishable, unafraid.

A section of the loft collapsed and the flames roared to the roof. The heat was terrible. But he did not turn his head nor shift his eyes from the figure on the step. He reached into the bag and took out two grenades and pulled the pins out with his teeth. He was careful and unhurried, thinking clearly and quite calmly:—there was nothing else to do; the pattern must go on, must work out to the end. Life was something that you couldn't just give up; it wouldn't let you. You had to keep it if you could, to fight for it to the last breath—

“You will come back to me.” That’s what she had said. But he was not coming back, not ever. It was hard to be cheated out of life before you had commenced, to have the cup snatched back before your lips had tasted it,—not to see her face again, not to touch her hand, never to know the comfort of her heart beating close to his. Yes, it was hard— A sob rose in his throat. “Come now,” he said, “no nonsense!”

Corporal Cat and Corporal Calf!—Yes, that was it exactly.—He buckled his helmet strap beneath his chin and zipped his collar close around his neck, as one who prepares to go out into the rain. “Good-bye, my dear—” he said. And then he stepped into the open doorway and flung the first grenade as far as he could throw.

Guns cracked from the sides and from the front. Something struck his shoulder hard enough to knock him down. But he was up and running, limping straight into the smoke of the explosion which spread its arms to hide him.

Dr. Hess rose from the step, but it did not cross his mind to look for shelter. A second explosion rent the air. Fragments of the gig were hurled

above the smoke, and two men who had been hidden at its back, came running for their lives. Glass crashed: the kitchen window shattered by the blast. A dozen guns were cracking, spitting jets of fire through the mist—

But still the doctor did not move. He was conscious of a thrill of admiration. The tactic of the enemy was a shrewd and desperate one: to lay his own barrage, advancing in the smoke screen. Perhaps he would win through, escape out of the trap. Perhaps— But no. The boy emerged out of the smoke, fumbling in the bag which was fastened on his breast, not running now but staggering,—limping painfully toward the house. He seemed to hesitate, to make a futile effort to go on, and then he fell, crumpling slowly to his knees, then flatly on his back. The guns were silent.

Dr. Hess ran to him and knelt down at his side. The boy was dying. He saw that at a glance; he had seen so many people die. The eyes were open but not seeing. The lips moved and he bent his head to catch the words.

“Mamma, help—put on the light—” And then he sighed like one awakening from deep and

troubled sleep, and a quiver shook his bleeding, torn body as life fluttered through it and away.

The doctor watched the frightened anguish fade out of his face, as he had watched it fade so many times from the faces of the dead. He could never make his mind up just what happened. It seemed as though the boy were smiling now. He closed the eyes and then— "But stop!" he muttered with a start. The boy had spoken German, not with a foreign accent; and dying soldiers did not speak in foreign tongues. He searched with trembling hands and found a metal disc and unclasped it from the wrist—

Others had run up, were crowding in a circle. Herr Doblemann, still pale but with a streak of blood across his jowl where flying glass had cut it, came puffing and pushing to the front.

"What does he say?" He elbowed closer. "Dr. Hess, what does he say?"

"Nothing." The doctor got up slowly. "He is dead."

"Ach, dead?" The mayor recoiled, clasping his fat hands. "But Herr Hintze will be very much annoyed."

"Dead in spite of that," the doctor said. He felt a kind of fury rising in him, surging up against the pressure of the sky. "Yes, dead—a German boy—German like ourselves."

"A German boy!" Herr Doblemann exclaimed. "What do you mean?" Dr. Hess held out the disc. He was afraid to speak,—afraid that he would scream or sob.

"But—but—" The mayor gazed stupidly. His little pig-like eyes were wide with fright; his flabby knees were shaking. "But I am not to blame. No, no. The boy was—mad."

"Yes, mad." The doctor said between his teeth. "But we are all a little mad, Herr Doblemann." Something made him turn his head. Herr Hintze was regarding him with a cold, impassive stare, his notebook in his hand. "I—I only meant—" he stammered, "—that is to say—"

Suddenly he turned and walked unsteadily toward the house—a frail, bent figure stumbling through the rain.—Ah God, what did it matter?—Tomorrow—or the next day—or the next—

THE END

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